

**A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF HOW SYSTEMS ANALYSIS  
IS A BIBLICALLY EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO DIAGNOSING  
PROBLEMS AND IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES WITH THE  
PURPOSE OF PROMOTING HEALTHY GROWTH IN A  
DECLINING CHRISTIAN SCHOOL**

**A THESIS**

**SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GORDON-CONWELL  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

**BY**

**GENIE BENNETT**

**MAY 2008**



# CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	v
GLOSSARY	vi
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMS THEORY	1
Introduction	1
Systems Analysis	3
Open and Closed Systems	11
Family Systems	16
Conclusion	21
2. THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL BASIS FOR SYSTEMS THEORY	23
Introduction	23
Old Testament	25
New Testament	27
Summary and Conclusion	49
3. LITERATURE REVIEW	52
Introduction	52
Corporate Systems Theory	53
Family Systems Theory	57

Systems Theory in Organizations that Act as Families	58
Culture	60
Combining Systems Thinking to Effect Healthy Change	66
The Cultural Impact of Open vs. Closed Systems	68
Conclusion	70
 4. METHODOLOGY: A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS CASE STUDY	 73
 5. CASE STUDY: A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF NEW HAMPSHIRE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL	 80
Introduction	80
History of the Organization	81
Identifying the Problems	83
Physical Plant	85
Leadership	90
Quality of Education	98
The Cultural Systems	101
The Results	106
 6. CONCLUSION	 113
 APPENDIX I   CONSULTING REPORT: NEW HAMPSHIRE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL 2001	 118
 APPENDIX II   UNDERSTANDING OUR STUDENTS	 153
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 174
 VITA	 177



## **FIGURES**

1.1	Systems Pyramid	5
1.2	Organization Chart	6
1.3	Spider Organization Chart	6
1.4	Spider Influence Chart	8
1.5	Systems Levels of Understanding	10
1.6	Linear Perspective of Family Systems	17
1.7	Family Systems Causal Loops	18
3.1	Comparison chart: linear vs. systems analysis	56
4.1	Systems Pyramid	78

# GLOSSARY

**Culture:** the accumulated shared learning of a given group, covering behavioral, emotional, and cognitive elements of the group members' total psychological functioning

**Hellenism:** Greek culture including Greek philosophies, emphasis on nude appearances of male athletes in the gymnasium, and an emphasis on things material

## Leadership Styles:

Authoritarian: dictatorial with no input from others

Consulting: leader is open to consult with others concerning decision options but reserves the right to make the final decision

Laissez-faire: that of little or no planning, structure or guidance, weak

## Systems:

Closed systems: an isolated system having little no interaction with an external environment or views the external environment with suspicion

Cybernetics: a system reads the input and automatically adapts to it

Events: surface issues that seem to be random or isolated

General systems theory: seeks to classify systems by the manner in which they are organized and by the interdependence of their parts

Homeostasis: achieving a balance between internal and external forces

Morphogenesis – system-enhancing behavior that allows for growth, creativity, innovation and change

Morphostasis – ability of a system to continually balance itself and maintain stability and equilibrium

Open systems: allows input from both internal and external sources

Patterns: relationships between seemingly isolated events indicating deeper

issues that are hidden from the casual observer

Structure: foundational issues, which are part of the fabric of the culture or organizational

Systems analysis: application of systems theory by looking at “wholes” and analyzing how the pieces fit and interact with each other

Systems: a complex of component parts that are in mutual interaction

# **ABSTRACT**

When organizations get themselves in trouble, they often call in a consultant. The purpose is to bring in a fresh set of eyes to help identify problems, and then to suggest solutions that will restore the organization's viability. This writer uses a systems analysis approach to the process, and believes that systems analysis is a biblically sound method of examining any entity to assess its viability. A business systems approach analyzes the organizational structure, and a family therapy systems approach assesses the culture, especially in organizations that choose to operate as a family. Characteristics of open and closed systems and the merits of both are discussed.

Chapter 1 defines both organizational and family therapy approaches to systems theory. Chapter 2 looks at scripture's support of systems analysis, and how systems thinking enhances understanding of biblical passages. The writer has a basic belief that an open system is biblically sound, and is the desired system that God had intended for his people. Chapter 3 is a literature review showing how systems analysis effectively applies to both secular and religious organizations.

In this project, the method used to verify the effectiveness of this approach is a single case study, and in chapter 4, the methodology is discussed. Chapter 5 is the case study of New Hampshire Christian School. In the case study, the reader will see how this writer took interviews from nearly 100 people, assessed the information, and was able to identify problems within the school. Solutions are discussed, and the outcome of the project is presented. Chapter 6 presents some long-term ramifications of the case study.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction to Systems Theory**

### Introduction

New Hampshire Christian School (not the real name) (NHCS) was in trouble. It could not pay its bills. Its students were acting out in the community. Its graduates were not being accepted into the colleges and universities that in the past had opened their doors to NHCS's students. Enrollment was dropping. The overseeing church, Grace Bible Church (not the real name), was no longer willing to cover the school's debts. The church appointed school board did not seem to be able to identify the problems within the school and solve them.

The church elders soon concluded that the school's struggles were harming the church, consuming its resources, and distracting it from its true mission. Over the years, the church had postponed the construction of a church building and had chosen to invest in the school, always with the hope of being able to build its own building later. The church building was never built, program development was postponed, and outreach possibilities were never developed because all the church resources were diverted to the school. Tired of the school's inability to survive on its own, the elders decided to call in a consultant. The consultant chosen is the writer of this project/thesis.

The philosophy used by this writer in consulting with organizations, whether profit or non-profit, Christian or non-Christian, is called systems analysis. Systems analysis, used properly, is an effective tool in identifying troubled areas within an

organization. Systems thinking is also a key element in developing solutions for difficult problems. Leaders often respond to events that occur, and not dig deeper for the causes of the events. When one digs deeper, patterns can emerge and potential issues can be identified, possible remedies discussed and future problems averted. Events are usually surface indicators of deeper issues. “We tend to focus on events rather than think about causes or how they fit into a larger pattern...but focusing on events is like wearing blinders: you can only react to each new event rather than anticipate and shape them.”<sup>1</sup>

Detecting patterns and trying to grasp their significance helps put events into perspective. “Patterns are trends, or changes in events over time. Whenever you see a pattern of events ...you’re getting closer to grasping the systemic structure driving that pattern”<sup>2</sup> Recognizing and exploring patterns are an important tool in diagnosing current and potential problems in an organization, and then helping provide possible solutions to fix the problem. “The essence of mastering systems thinking as a management discipline lies in seeing patterns where others see only events and forces to react to.”<sup>3</sup>

The focus of this project is to examine the biblical and research rationale for using a systems approach in identifying systemic problems in Christian organizations, specifically a Christian school. The writer of this thesis believes that the scriptures, especially in the New Testament, and, in particular Jesus’ approach, support and validate a systems approach to problem solving as being thoroughly biblical. To understand the systems application, it is necessary to briefly define and discuss systems thinking both from an organizational standpoint and, since many Christian organizations opt to operate

---

1. Virginia Anderson, and Lauren Johnson, *Systems Thinking Basics: From Concepts to Causal Loops* (Waltham, MA: Pegasus Communications, Inc., 1997), 6.

2. Ibid., 6.

3. Peter M. Senge. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990), 126.

as a family rather than a formal corporate entity, from a family systems viewpoint as well.

### Systems Analysis

Using an approach of looking at “wholes” and analyzing how the pieces fit together is called systems analysis. The linear thinking approach to problem solving that we are accustomed to is “a plus b equals c.” In systems approach, it is not initially about reaching conclusions as much as it is about examining the relationships between the parts. In systems analysis, it more important to understand how a, b, and c relate to each other. It is how the parts relate to each other that determines the whole. Systems analysis is a viable process through which it is possible to uncover organizational weaknesses and structures that inhibit positive growth. “The essence of the discipline of systems thinking lies in a shift of mind: seeing interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains, and, seeing processes of change rather than snapshots.”<sup>4</sup> It is the entire system that determines the organization, and the organization is the result of the systems’ parts working together to create the whole.

It is possible to identify five characteristics of systems. These characteristics clarify how to separate a system from other groupings that seem to be related to each other such as a collection of like items, i.e., a miscellaneous pile of plumbing pipes as opposed to a working hot water heating system. The characteristics are as follows:

1. A system’s parts must all be present for the system to carry out its purpose optimally.

---

4. Ibid., 73.

2. A system's parts must be arranged in a specific way for the system to carry out its purpose.
3. Systems have a specific purpose within a larger system.
4. Systems maintain their stability through fluctuations and adjustments.  
"Systems achieve this stability through the interactions, feedback, and adjustments that continually circulate between the system parts and between the system and its environment."
5. Systems have feedback.<sup>5</sup>

"Systems thinking is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past fifty years, to make the full patterns clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively."<sup>6</sup> "Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing 'wholes'.... [It] is a sensibility for the subtle interconnectedness that gives ...systems their unique character....[It is] a discipline for seeing "structures that underlie complex situations, and for discerning high from low leverage change.... [It is] the antidote to this sense of helplessness that many feel.... By seeing 'wholes' we learn how to foster health."<sup>7</sup> What is being stressed here is that if one is to really look at an organization or study a group dynamic, it is necessary to examine the relationships that exist between the various parts of the whole organization. In examining the relationships, one must evaluate the quality of the relationships (how they communicate among themselves and cooperate with each other) and then assess how often this all happens. Once these relationships are revealed and understood, it becomes possible to proceed to the next step.

There are three important levels of systems analysis that must be incorporated into the study if the study is to be viable. These three levels are identified as events, patterns,

---

5. Anderson and Johnson, 4.

6. Senge, 7.

7. Anderson and Johnson, 68-69.



and structure. They need to be used together to identify problems and then examined in depth to provide solutions for the problems. A good way to visualize the three is to see them as a pyramid<sup>8</sup> as seen in figure 1.1.

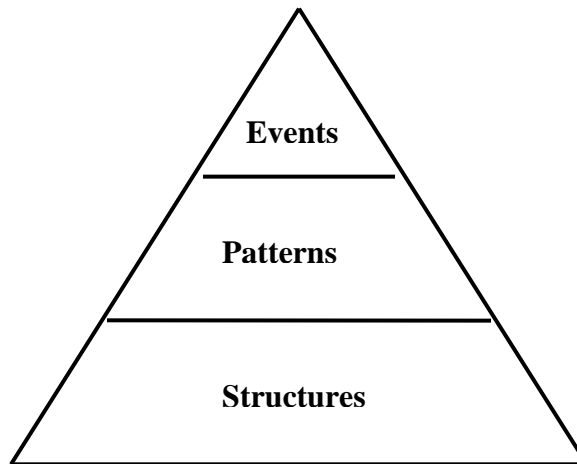


Figure 1.1 Systems Pyramid Structure

The pyramid diagram shows the structure as the foundation of the organization. It is possible to diagram what is generally called an organizational chart. This is usually based on individual positions of authority from the top of the company to the bottom. However, systems structure is not based as much on positions and authority as much as it is based on relationships and how the various parts of the organization relate to each other. Organizational charts based on authority look like pillars (figure 1.2). Structures based on systems analysis may look more like an elaborate, intricate spider web (figure 1.3). It is the patterns, revealed by events that begin to form the connected lines in the spider web.

---

8. Ibid., 7.

Examine the simplified organizational structure of some church denominations.

The following is a generic diagram (figure 1.2) of a very simple organizational chart based on position and seeming authority.

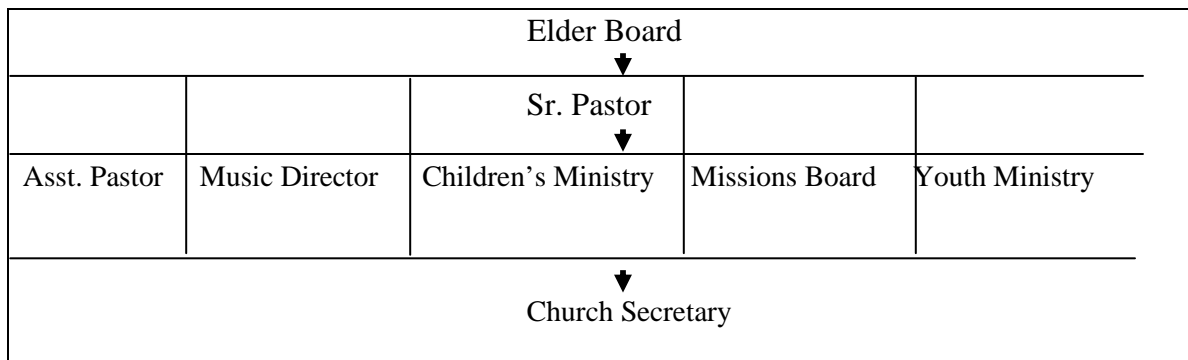


Figure 1.2 Traditional Organizational Chart

It is very much a top down chart. The true structure may look somewhat different. Compare figure 1.2 and 1.3. In figure 1.3 the solid lines indicate direct reporting relationships. The dotted lines indicate an indirect reporting relationship. Using a systems approach the structure become less top-down and the relationship lines are more apparent.

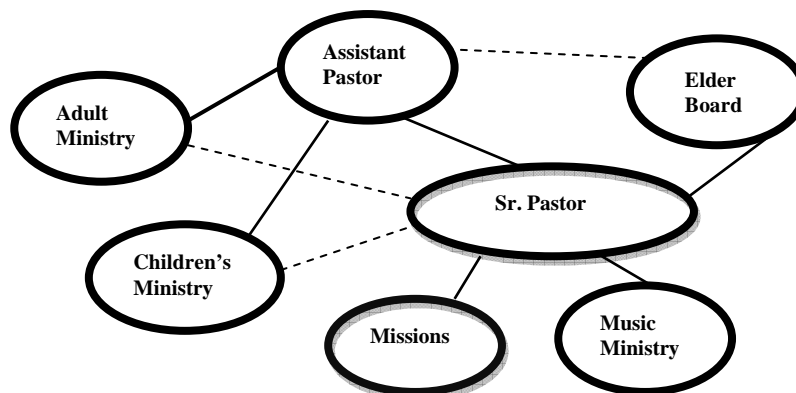


Figure 1.3 Spider Organizational Chart

Notice that, while the Assistant Pastor directly reports to the Senior Pastor, he also has a relationship with and responsibility to the Elder board. The relationship diagrammed here is much closer in figure 1.3 than in figure 1.2. Children's Ministry and Adult Ministry report directly to the Assistant Pastor, but indirectly report to the Senior Pastor, whereas Missions and the Music Ministry report directly to the Senior Pastor, but have no other reporting channels.

While figure 1.3 above is used here for diagramming reporting channels, the same web style diagram can also be used to track other issues or relationships. When coming into an organization as a new person with authority, whether it be a consultant trying to understand the existing culture or a new pastor trying to identify potential pitfalls before he or she becomes an inadvertent victim, it is helpful to begin to diagram some of the issues. This type of web diagram is especially helpful when trying to track a hidden source of conflict within the congregation. Below is a diagram tracking the use of power and influence in a church but not necessarily decision-making authority.

Examine figure 1.4 closely. The reality mapped here has no relation to the organizational charts in figures 1.2 or 1.3. The influence mapped here is from the center outwards rather than from the top down. In addition, the largest circle has the most influence and, the smaller the circle, the smaller the influence. The church secretary is at the center and wields a great deal of influence. Everything goes through her, and yet, in the formal organizational chart she is at the bottom. While she may not have decision-making abilities, she may be using her "front line" position to talk to or "confide" in people, spread gossip, leak confidential information, or sabotage leadership plans which she does not support. Tracking power and decision influencers is very illuminating and

helpful when trying to effect change in an organization. In the words of an unknown illusionist, “Things are not always as they seem.”

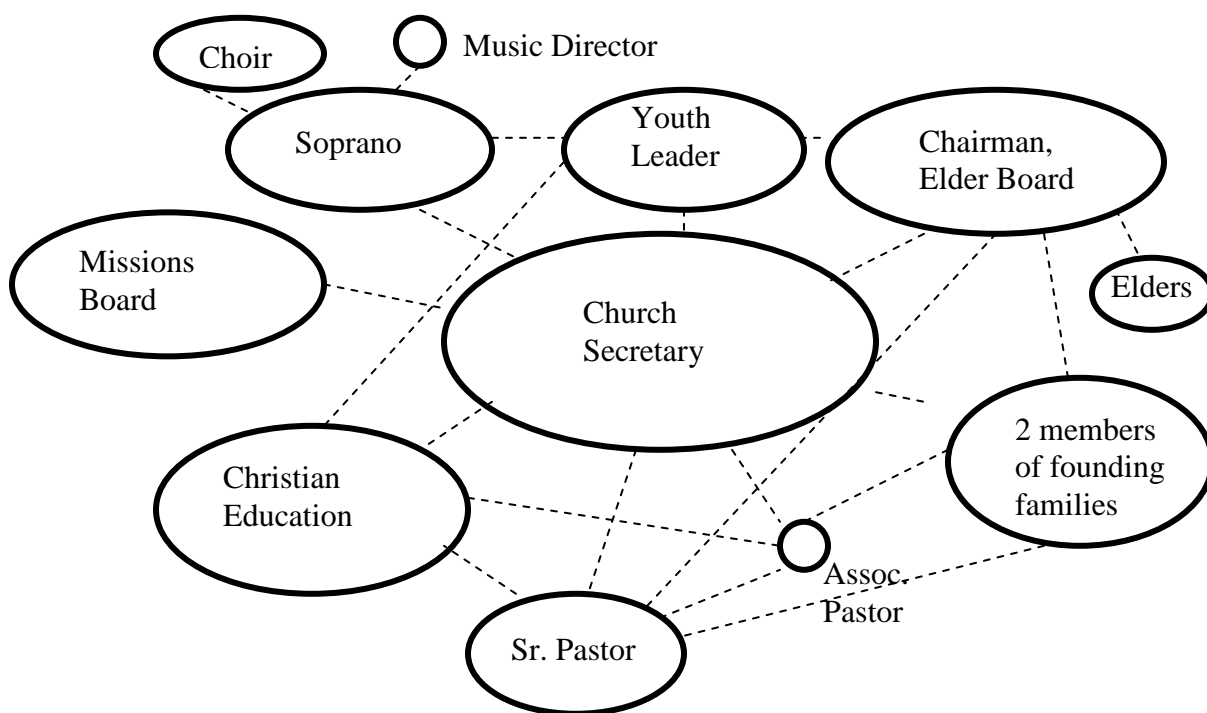


Figure 1.4 Spider Influence Chart

Notice the music department in the upper left corner. The music director may be the head of the music department, but the strongest source of influence is the soprano, who influences both the choir and the music director. If one wanted to effect change in the music department, it would be necessary to gain the support of the soprano before anything would succeed.

On this chart, there are also two members of founding families who wield a great deal of power, more power than the senior pastor, and yet, do not appear on the organizational charts in figures 1.2 or 1.3. Notice that the senior pastor has little real

influence on the youth program although the Chairman of the Elders does; the associate pastor, while somewhat connected, has a very small sphere of influence. Notice, too, that while the Chairman of the Elder Board has a great deal of influence, the elder board as a whole does not. Understanding this concept of a structural spider web becomes very important when a person is trying to understand an existing system. Systems analysis can reveal this type of underlying power of influence.<sup>9</sup>

Another aspect of systems thinking is understood by examining the structure of the organization. It is possible to define systems structures as “the overall way in which the system components are interrelated... [and] because structure is defined by the interrelationships of a system’s parts, and not the parts themselves, structure is invisible.”<sup>10</sup> When a leader only looks at the company through the lens of the organizational chart, a “pillar” structure is all the leader sees and misses the larger picture. When a leader examines the “pyramid” structure in which all the departments together form a platform base with no walls separating them, the relationships between departments becomes clear and problems between departments become obvious. When only the “pillars” are recognized, problems may go unrecognized, and consequently, unresolved. In other words, without the connected lines in the spider web, all that is left is a series of unconnected strands that have only one point of contact with each other. In an actual spider web, the connecting point is the center, whereas in an organization, it is at the top. With connecting strands throughout the organization at all levels, individual

---

9. This concept is based on material found in Charles Cosgrove and Dennis Hatfield’s book *Church Conflict: the Hidden Systems Behind the Fight* (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1994). Being able to diagram influence is a powerful tool in exposing sources of conflict when trying to bring about much needed change.

10. Anderson and Johnson, 5.

groups are able to work efficiently and cohesively as one unit at all levels, and problems are either solved while they are minor or averted altogether.

Thinking at the structural level moves one from seeing a variety of issues as isolated events to seeing the underlying patterns. This leads to a deeper understanding of problems in the structure. “Thinking at the structural level means thinking in terms of causal connections. It is the structural level that holds the key to lasting, high-leverage change.”<sup>11</sup> Thinking at this level affects the future. It requires creativity because it helps to create a desired, different future.<sup>12</sup> Here is a chart that looks at the levels of understanding at each level.<sup>13</sup>

	Action Mode	Time Orientation	Witness Event	Questions to ask
Events	React!	Present	Witness Event	What is the fastest way to react now?
Patterns	Adapt!	Present	Measure or track patterns of events	What kinds of trends or patterns of events seem to be recurring?
Structure	Create Change!	Future	Causal Loop diagrams and other systems thinking tools	What structures are in place that are causing these patterns?

Figure 1.5 Systems Levels of Understanding

In looking at this chart, one can see that each level is important and serves a purpose. However, no one level is enough in and of itself. The event level is for solving immediate problems needing immediate solutions. By looking at the patterns level, it is

---

11. Ibid., 8.

12. Ibid., 9.

13. Ibid.

possible to ascertain whether an event is an aberration, or whether it is part of a larger collection of similar events indicating a deeper problem. Events and patterns are short-term solutions that affect the present. However, in order to effect long-lasting change in an organization, it is necessary to understand the structural level. To affect the future of the organization, its structure must be identified and long-term strategies implemented at this level. These three, (events, patterns, and structure) are integral components of an organization that impact how an organization's parts relate to each other, and how the organization responds to outside factors which may require internal changes.

### Open and Closed Systems

In family therapy, open and closed systems “refer to the nature of the boundaries a family established around family members and between itself and other systems. The more input family members accept from other family members, or a family allows from other systems, the more open it is. Conversely, the less input permitted, the more closed.”<sup>14</sup> This definition will be used throughout this project and will be applied to organizations. An organization is a group of people (like a family) working together towards a common purpose. Therefore, there is constant input. The term “cybernetic” is generally applied to feedback.<sup>15</sup> A cybernetic system reads feedback and automatically adapts to it. The dynamic nature of an organization requires both flexibility and change

---

14. Dorothy Stroh Becvar and Raphael J. Becvar, *Systems Theory and Family Therapy: A Primer* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), 23.

15. Irene Goldenberg and Herbert Goldenberg, *Family Therapy: An Overview* (Pacific Grove, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1991), 8.

while maintaining its balance. The ability of a system to continually balance itself is called homeostasis.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of homeostasis is somewhat restrictive and misleading when applied to systems. A system seeks stability. Yet to continue to be healthy, it must also be able to change ... Morphostasis is similar in meaning to homeostasis with the addition of the fact that it connotes stability in the context of change. In other words, in order to be able to remain stable, a system must be able to change as appropriate. By contrast, morphogenesis [change] delineates the system-enhancing behavior that allows for growth, creativity, innovation, and change, which are all characteristics of functional families [and organizations].<sup>17</sup>

A closed system is usually associated with a mechanistic system, such as an electrical system or a plumbing system. If these systems open up, it causes a destructive fire or a damaging flood. A closed system under these conditions is optimal. However, a closed system in an organization or family, which involves people and relationships, is not desirable.

The parts of a mindless mechanical system, just like the whole, have no choice. Its structure is designed into it, leaving it with no ability to restructure itself. The system functions reactively and can operate effectively only if its environment remains stable or has little effect on it...The purpose, in view of the inherent vulnerability and unstable structure of open systems, is survival.<sup>18</sup>

As a result of the need for maintaining stability, closed organizational systems foster a tightly controlled top-down authoritarian or paternalistic management style.

Although unminded systems have a choice, their parts do not. They operate on cybernetic principles as a homeostatic system, reacting to information in the same way as a thermostat...The operation of an unminded system is totally under the control of a single brain, the executive function, which, by means of a communication network, receives information from a variety of sensing parts and issues directions that activate relevant parts of the system.<sup>19</sup>

---

16. Becvar and Becvar, 22.

17. Ibid., 22.

18. Ibid., 11.

19. Ibid.



Within a closed system, employees do as they are directed, perform only the tasks identified in a detailed job description, and have little or no input into the organization as a whole. Closed systems do not create a culture of leadership development, nor do they encourage innovation and creativity from the bottom up.

“When parts display choice, the central issues become conflict and the ability to deal with it. However, as long as paternalism is the dominant culture, the imperatives of ‘father knows best’ or ‘give the apple to your sister’ become an effective way to handle conflict. Paternalism best approximates the essential characteristics of an unminded system.”<sup>20</sup>

Open organizational systems are the opposite. They are systems that continually interact with the world around them, welcome team leadership, and encourage input from those within the organization at all levels as well as those from outside. “The members of a sociocultural organization are held together by one or more common objectives and collectively acceptable ways of pursuing them. The members share values that are embedded in their culture. The culture is the cement that integrates the parts into a cohesive whole.”<sup>21</sup> Organizations that encourage an open system-style culture are organizations that have defined their core values, are continually learning and growing as an entity, and yet know their vision and mission, and remain committed to the purpose of the organization. These systems are deemed open systems because information and influence flows through the entire organization and outward into the external environment. There is also input from the external environment, which helps define a need in the larger context. The mission and vision of the organization determine whether or not the organization can satisfy that need. For-profit companies are driven by corporate earnings and will do whatever is necessary to increase profits. These organizations are

---

20. Ibid., 12.

21. Ibid., 13.

less apt to become closed to outside influences, because their livelihood is dependent on their relevance to the larger community.

Non-profit organizations are more committed to the ideals of the organization; profit is viewed not as the end in itself, but as the means to an end, the fulfillment/attainment of the organization's goal. Therefore, this type of organization is more susceptible to becoming less concerned with input from outside and more concerned with internal ideals. When a cultural system cannot adapt to another system without upsetting its internal balance, the system will tighten up the outside boundaries. As a result, it becomes less adaptable and more closed to outside influences. It is the belief of this writer that closed systems are often created out of fear. It may be fear of the unknown, fear of reprisal, fear of breaking the rules or perhaps of some unspecified fear creating a need for the security of defined boundaries.

A company with an open system viewpoint remains successful in business with relevant, high quality goods and services. In the business world, most companies have a marketing department. One of the marketing department's functions is to communicate with the world outside the company. Its responsibility is to be the ear of the company, to hear from the marketplace what it desires in products and services, as well as being the mouthpiece of the company, telling the world how the company has responded to its requests for products and services. Without the marketing department, the company would have no way of dialoguing with its customers and have no way of becoming relevant to its customer base.

The open system provides a win/win situation for both those working towards the goal and the organization as a whole. Those in the trenches have opportunities to

participate in ways that make key contributions to the organization as a whole, and the organization flourishes in all areas. The open system provides opportunities for everyone at all levels of the organization to contribute to the well being of the whole.

In the non-profit sector, circumstances are different because resources are more limited. Even while resources are limited, the ideals of the organization may put even more limitations on the organizational system. If the system is “closed” and specific cultural rules must be followed, the pool from which workers can be accessed is limited. In trying to find help, the organization becomes more focused on finding a warm body that is in agreement with the cultural and ideological focus of the organization to fill a particular position, and pays less attention to whether the individual is qualified to do the job.

The non-profit also depends heavily on volunteers, those who are looking for personal satisfaction or growth, rather than career opportunities. Because the personal rewards are intangible rather than life-sustaining, it is even more important that an organization be open to the needs of the larger community. The volunteers of today are those people who want to use their time wisely and fruitfully for themselves and the causes in which they believe. They cross all age groups, genders, religious beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. They volunteer for a variety of reasons, all of them valid.

According to a 1988 Independent Sector survey conducted by the Gallup Organization, 56% of volunteers donated their time because they wanted to do something useful.

Another 34% enjoyed the nature of the work; 27% wanted to benefit a friend or family

member and 22% volunteered for religious reasons.<sup>22</sup> Open systems meet the needs of today's employees and volunteers while helping them remain true to their ideals.

Regardless of whether the organization has an open or closed system, the goals, values, and culture are impersonal. They are related to the well-being of the organization rather than its employees. In a family, the goals are much more personal. Sometimes an organization chooses to operate as a family, making the goals, values, etc., more personal to all involved. This is particularly relevant in a non-profit organization that is founded on a set of ideals and values rather than on the "bottom line."

### Family Systems

Systems theory is used in family therapy as a tool to help therapists understand family dynamics. In a family, there are relationships between family members as well as common goals and values. There is also a created culture, which is communicated to all members of the family. The goals, values and culture are much more personal than in most organizations. However, as will be seen, there are hidden aspects of family relationships that, while they work in families, can cause deep problems in an organization.

Open and closed systems within a family can have long lasting effects. We saw earlier how important boundaries are in this process. "Recursion refers to the ongoing mutual influence and shared responsibility of the members of a relationship or system... We move away from the concepts of blame or guilt. Rather, we recognize that regardless of the state of our relationship with another person, we have created it

---

22. Adapted from Margie Morris, *Volunteer Ministries* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1994), 13.

together. Each person gets 50% of the responsibility.”<sup>23</sup> This means that events are part of a larger context, and therefore, patterns have more meanings than individuals. It also means that while an event may place blame on one individual, patterns may reflect behaviors pertaining to all individuals involved. The results of such an examination are apt to reveal the source of the difficulty as being different than what was originally thought. While the pyramid diagram in figure 1.1 (page 5) was originally for organizations, the principles displayed also apply to all sociocultural groups including families.

Family therapy works not only with individuals within a particular family, but it also recognizes the relationships between members of the family and the family’s spoken and unspoken rules. The systems perspective, therefore, moves us away from linear cause-effect thinking, i.e., that A influences B but B does not influence A, as in the following examples:

“I treat you like a child because you behave like a child.”

*or*

“I behave like a child because you treat me like a child.”



Figure 1.6 Linear Perspective of Family systems

With a systems perspective we are moved to a reciprocal or circular causality, i.e., A and B are in dynamic interaction, as illustrated below.

“When I treat you like a child, you behave like a child, and then I treat you

---

23. Ibid., 27.

like a child even more and you behave even more like a child. We sure have a vicious cycle going, don't we?"

*or*

"When I behave like a child, you treat me like a child, and then I behave like a child even more and you treat me like a child even more. We are sure caught up with each other, aren't we?"<sup>24</sup>



Figure 1.7 Family Systems Causal Loop

Family therapists using a systems approach tend to focus on how patterns of interaction maintain the problem by looking at the larger picture, as seen here in figure 1.7, rather than staying at the event level, as in figure 1.6. Staying at the event level does not promote understanding, and subsequently, does not encourage a change in behavior. It may be a series of behaviors that form patterns by more than one person within the family, rather than one person being the problem. As we see in figure 1.6, the childlike behavior feeds on response behaviors by more than one person. Family systems analysis assumes that the family as a whole is larger than the sum of its parts.

When organizations operate culturally as a family system, similar patterns occur. This concept is fundamental in understanding the dynamics of a family, but it is much harder to identify in organizations. Family systems, whether in the context of a family consisting of parents and children, or in an organization such as a church or a school, are systems based on relationships. "What most distinguishes relationship systems from other systems are emotional processes. These processes are driven by and organized around

---

24. Ibid., 7.

two forces: the need to be separate and the need to be close.”<sup>25</sup> It is the constant struggle between these two desires that can affect the homeostasis of the larger system. When balance is not achieved in a reasonable amount of time, weaker members of the “family” become anxious, and the anxiety can become infectious. “Common activators [of anxiety] are changes and losses. They upset the stable patterns and balance of the system.”<sup>26</sup> Anxiety, if it is not relieved in a reasonable length of time, will become focused on an individual. That individual then becomes the one who seems to be responsible for all the family’s problems, the scapegoat (Leviticus 16).

Relationships in families are complex. However, “it is the redundant patterns of interaction between and among family members, which distinguish their system of relationships from any other relationships. These patterns may be called family rules, and they usually exist outside the awareness of the people in a relationship.”<sup>27</sup>

Some families believe the external world is unreliable and fearsome. They make the home into a monastery with its shades down. Others find such confinement stifling. Some families develop closeness in play and ecstasy. Others stay emotionally connected by hostility... one family rewards creativity; the other conformity. On one side of the street, rituals are part of the family’s bonds. Across the street, communal rights succumb to private rights. Some families hand their children scripts of mercy: ‘Be who you are. We will be there when you need us.’ Others, though, troubled by closeness, say, ‘Be who you are but don’t bother us.’ And, some give a child a script for fusion: ‘Be there for us and we will love you.’<sup>28</sup>

As an integral part of looking at family dynamics, whether it is in an organizational environment or a nuclear family setting, it is important to ascertain whether the family system is open or closed. Characteristics of a closed family system include:

---

25. Peter Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1993), 10.

26. Ibid., 13.

27. Becvar and Becvar, 28.

28. Steinke, 34.

1. Conformity and obedience to rigid rules, values and expectations with severe punishment for those violating those rules
2. A tense and negative emotional atmosphere
3. A pattern of rigid thoughts, beliefs, and values
4. A strong resistance to change and growth
5. A pattern of decision making revealing that all decisions are typically made by one person, overriding decisions by all others
6. Each gender and/or position having their own assigned roles
7. Conditional love is based on behavior
8. Attitudes towards outsiders exemplifying suspicions towards outside relationships ... society as being separate and 'out there'<sup>29</sup>

These cultural traits of a closed system in a family may also apply to an organization operating as a family system.

Open systems are typically democratic, flexible, nurturing, and freedom-granting.

“The open style family encourages each person to grow and be all that they can be.”<sup>30</sup>

The key difference between the two systems is, while the closed system regards the world outside the confines of its own boundaries with suspicion, an open system welcomes the world outside with the attitude that change and new experiences are opportunities. The world is a place to be explored – not to fear.<sup>31</sup>

---

29. Rodney Cooper, *We Stand Together: Reconciling Men of Different Color* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 25-28.

30. Ibid., 28.

31. Ibid., 29.



## Conclusion

Systems analysis is an approach that studies relationships between the various parts of an organization, a family, a church, or any other entity that is comprised of various parts. When trying to analyze the source of problems in an organization, it is helpful to use the framework of the pyramid structure on page 5 to group like problems together to ascertain whether or not there are recurring themes (patterns) across departments giving insight into organizational structural problems. A quote attributed to Aristotle says, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” meaning that often by looking at individual parts exclusively, it is possible to miss the larger picture of what the “whole” really is.

The word “whole” implies that there are parts, and the parts are connected. Wholeness is not to be confused with oneness. Wholeness is not about seamlessness; wholeness is not sameness. Wholeness means two or more parts are interconnected. No single element of the whole is thought of as functioning independently of the other components. Wholeness is relational. In wholeness differences are not eliminated; rather they become alive. The different parts interact and cooperate. Wholeness involves various parts coming together and interacting.<sup>32</sup>

Systems analysis allows the investigator to see the “whole”; not only the pieces, but the relationships between the pieces as well.

Seeing the interrelationships between organizational departments is important in a business environment, but it is also important in personal relationships as well. The culture of any group is as important to the success of a group as its organizational structure. Every group, whether it is a business, church, or family has its rules, both expressed and hidden, which define the culture of the group. Systems analysis recognizes

---

32. Peter Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (1996: The Alban Institute, Herndon, VA), 6.

the importance of culture in groups. By recognizing and understanding the group culture, the relationships between departments and individuals are given a framework. This understanding also gives leaders and consultants a window into the priorities of the group as a whole, the communication styles that exist between different groups, and loyalties between individuals or certain small groups that may be hidden.

Systems may also be open or closed, or some varying degree of the extremes of either. The degree of openness is impacted by the level of rigidity of the boundary. The more rigid and inflexible the boundary, the more closed the system. Sometimes the boundaries tighten as the system feels threatened. When a healthy system stabilizes and feels safe, it will often open up again. However, an unhealthy system may not reopen and will often create stronger, less flexible boundaries to protect itself against future attack. It is when these less flexible boundaries become fixed, and maintaining the rigid boundary becomes more important than the overall health of the system that the culture can become destructive. As the boundaries tighten, there is less freedom for each of the parts within the system to be independent. For mechanical systems, it is optimum to have the boundaries tightly closed. For systems that involve people, it is ideal to have boundaries that are flexible enough to allow the organization to remain true to its ideals while being a positive influence in the external environment and allows the people in the system to grow and develop in positive ways.

## **Chapter 2**

# **Theological and Biblical Basis for Systems Theory**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to do a theological and biblical study of systems. The author will use history, context, and biblical theology to prove not only the existence of systems in scripture, but also the injury caused by a closed system and the health produced by an open system. Using a systems analysis approach to understanding any entity, whether it is a business organization, a family, or even something as intangible as a national culture or a set of religious beliefs, is a helpful approach in discovering the values, ideals, and even hidden (or not so hidden) rules that are accepted practices within the system. Systems thinking is not a moral value system in conflict with an existing system; it is merely a method of examination. As such, it is a viable approach to use in examining and revealing systems in the Old Testament as well as 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Judaism and early Christianity.

It is reasonable to ask, “What type of system, open or closed, was Jesus promoting in his teachings, and what type of system was the early church modeling?” It is necessary to examine the systems in place in the Bible to understand the true nature of what legitimately may be defined as a biblical model of organizational design.

When Jesus arrived in the early 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the world into which he emerged was fragmented, tempestuous, and chaotic. The Romans were currently in control of

Palestine, giving tacit rule to the Herodian dynasty founded by Herod the Great.

Alexander the Great had swept into the region three centuries before, spreading the Greek Hellenistic culture with missionary fervor. Nowhere was this felt more than in Israel. In this place, at this time, there was a resounding clash of cultures, but more importantly, a collision between systems. Greek and Roman cultures, although different in some ways, were compatible in many others. Jewish culture, particularly within some of the religious sects, was very different from both of them. Values, goals, and deeply-held beliefs were in direct opposition to each other. In this environment, homeostasis (stability), and more importantly, morphostasis (stability and equilibrium) within the Jewish system could not be achieved.

During the time of the Babylonian exile, religious Jews had determined that their exile was a direct result of their disobedience to the laws of Yahweh. Consequently, these men were determined to not let that level of disobedience reoccur and established a religious life comprised of strict laws and observances that demanded obedience to the letter as well as the spirit of the law. That system became the standard in Israel. When the Greek and Roman cultures became dominant, the religious community reacted. In an effort to preserve the existing system, the entire Jewish system tightened its boundaries. As the community tightened its boundaries, the culture became less flexible and less responsive to its members. The question then becomes, "Is this tightening of the boundaries consistent with God's plan for his followers?" It is this writer's belief that closed systems are not consistent with the teachings of the Bible, and that Jesus continually challenged the Jewish religious and political leaders on their closed systems approach to their worship, their doctrine and their faith.

## Old Testament

The Jews of the Old Testament had certain religious beliefs that were non-negotiable and deeply ingrained in their culture. The first was that Yahweh, God, was a single being. Not only was Yahweh a single being, but the only God in existence. This came from Genesis 1 where God placed Himself as the creator and above all other Gods. It was reinforced in Exod 20:2 in the Ten Commandments. The second deeply-held ingrained belief was that God was the creator of the universe (Gen 1), and that God was involved in the activities of all that happened in the universe. The third was that the Jews had a unique status under God. They believed that God had singled them out as a favored people (Gen 15).<sup>1</sup> The Jews felt special, singled out, and protected from the evils of the world.

Rules were established, putting boundaries on the cultural system. The book of Leviticus spells them out. They were specific and rigid. The rules were necessary due to the lack of maturity of the Jewish people. Just as small children need more rules and tighter boundaries because they do not have the maturity of adults to make the best decisions for their own well-being, the initial laws of Leviticus were established as a starting place for the development of the Jews. As children grow and learn, they are given more latitude, so as the Jewish people matured in their faith, more freedom would ensue, as seen when Jesus attempts to open the system in the first-century AD. While the rules seemed rigid at the outset, they were designed to keep the people healthy (Lev 11-19).

---

1. J. Julius Scott, Jr., *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 64.

They created a society in which families were stable (Exod 20:12-17). They created worship practices that fit worship practices of the time (Lev 1-10). They established Yahweh as a reasonable God who did not require things of people that were destructive to them, such as the child sacrifices of the Canaanites. However, as often happens in a system that seems to be controlled by rules, when the rules relaxed the people in the system forgot the rules altogether.

The Old Testament prophets deliberately sought to bring the Jewish people back to the worship of Yahweh and away from the practice of acknowledging and worshipping pagan gods, to no avail. The Babylonian empire conquered Jerusalem in 586 BC and carried away thousands of Jews. This led devout Jews to search for reasons why Yahweh had deserted them. “The prophetic predictions of judgment were now viewed as accomplished facts. The recognition that God had allowed his people to be conquered was a sobering reality. It provided a powerful reminder that God’s person, will, and requirements are not to be taken lightly. The consequences of doing so are considerable.”<sup>2</sup> As the Jewish community in Babylon sought to reestablish stability within itself in a foreign land, the cultural boundaries began to tighten. “One concrete effect of captivity and restoration was that shift of emphasis which took study of and obedience to the law more seriously. God’s revealed will and instructions were not to be trifled with. There were increased efforts to please God by careful observance of prescribed forms, ceremonies, and behavior, and to remember his roles as lawgiver and judge.”<sup>3</sup> This outcome of the Babylonian exile was taken seriously by devout Jews and contributed to the need to be less open to cultural and religious changes. In an effort to

---

2. Ibid., 267.

3. Ibid.

reestablish homeostasis in the system by tightening the boundaries, devout Jews reinstituted the scrupulous keeping of the covenant rules and stipulations. The rules that initially were meant to keep the Jews safe, healthy, and worshipful became the price for achieving salvation. By the first century AD, a religious legalism had developed, contributing to a closed system.

### New Testament

The Hellenistic culture was very attractive to many Jews, especially the young men. It was a culture devoted to developing the body and mind. It glorified the human body, and the gymnasium became the focal point in Hellenistic society. The gymnasium was the center of communal life, business, and learning, as well as a place for exercise and bathing.<sup>4</sup> The games and competitions were very popular with many Jewish youths, but more conservative Jews objected to the nudity of the sports culture. This directly clashed with the Jews' modest lifestyle. Hellenism also had a variety of different philosophical schools of thought where people were encouraged to think differently. Greek thought was not based on tradition, but on new ideas and new ways of thinking. These philosophies opened discussions of speculation on a variety of subjects, including speculations about God, which were offensive to traditional Jewish religious leaders.

Two prominent political/religious groups, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, are mentioned in the gospels. They are mentioned in relation to how each of the two groups

---

4. Ibid., 114.

reacted to the imposed Hellenistic culture and how each sought to preserve their existing cultural system.

The boundaries of open and closed systems are often not well defined. It is possible to open in some aspects and closed in other aspects. The group identified as the Sadducees wanted to appear religious, and yet, power, wealth, and prestige were their desired goals. The boundaries of this cultural/family system were porous from a cultural perspective, but were more tightly closed from a religious perspective. In order to integrate both Hellenism and Judaism, the Sadducees limited their scripture base to the Torah and ignored other sacred writings and teachings. The priestly families were part of this sect because of their desire for wealth and positions of political authority. If they were to keep their places in society, it was necessary for them to embrace the Hellenistic principles. However, Scott quotes Josephus as saying that the Sadducees would submit to the Pharisees on matters of procedures in public ceremonies and religious rituals. Otherwise, the masses would not tolerate them.<sup>5</sup>

Another Jewish sect mentioned throughout the Gospels was the Pharisees. “Their name means ‘separated ones.’ Although some have suggested that the separation was from the common people, it is more probable that the Pharisees were so named because of their zeal for the Law which involved separation from the influences of Hellenism.”<sup>6</sup> The Pharisees had a cultural/family system that was more closed to Hellenism than the Sadducees. While they were conservative and had strong boundaries designed to keep Hellenism at a distance, they did not retreat from the larger society. Religiously, their

---

5. Ibid., 176.

6. Ibid., 594.



system was conservative and rules based. Unlike the Sadducees, they did believe in the resurrection, angels, and spirits.

## Gospels

In Matt 22:23-33 Jesus confronts the Sadducees, not about their Hellenistic political and cultural leanings or the reasons for it, but about their religious beliefs, and their interpretation of scripture. (The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, angels, or spirits (Acts 23:8). They believed that the human soul dies with the body and that spending eternity in heaven was a myth. They interpreted the Mosaic Law literally and were very exacting in Levitical purity. They attributed everything to free will.)

That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. “Teacher,” they said, “Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?”

Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching. Jesus states their belief of no resurrection is erroneous and then uses the Torah the very scriptures they were using to deny it, to prove it to them.

Then Jesus went on to demolish the whole Sadducean position. They had always held that there was no text in the Pentateuch, which could be used to prove the resurrection of the dead. Now, what was one of the commonest titles of God in the Pentateuch? ‘The God of Abraham, and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ God cannot be

the God of dead men and of moldering corpses. The living God must be the God of living men. The Sadducean case was shattered.<sup>7</sup>

The implications of this belief are enormous when taken in the context of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, as proof of the deity of Jesus. In this passage, there was no indictment for their adoption of Hellenistic ways, only for their interpretation of Scripture. Jesus shattered their closed religious system with something that was familiar to all Jews, but the New Testament does not record any place where Jesus confronted them about their attraction to the Greek culture. Jesus confronted their closed religious system.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), we see Jesus widening both the boundaries of the Sadducean cultural system and their more closed religious system of their religious system. Levitical purity was imperative to the priestly role in Jewish society. Both priests and Levites tended to belong to the Sadducean sect, although not necessarily exclusively. At issue in this parable are the rules of purity, specifically as they apply to priests and Levites. In Luke 10:15-27, a teacher of the law asks a legitimate question, a question designed to test Jesus' wisdom. It is not known whether the law expert belonged to the Sadducee sect or not, but Jesus' response speaks clearly to the closed Sadducean belief system that the purity laws take precedence over all else.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?' He answered: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' [Dt 6:5]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself' [Lev 19:18]. 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.' But he wanted to justify

---

7. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 277.

himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ In reply, Jesus said: ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

‘Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’

It is the characters, in this interesting passage, that have significance. There are three key characters: the Priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan. Each of these three men is significant, each in a different way. The victim himself does not seem to be significant. The priest and the Levite, both holy men serving holy functions in the Jewish religious system, stay on the other side of the road and make no effort to help the victim. The laws of Levitical purity regarding physical contact with corpses are spelled out clearly in Num 19. It is safe to assume that these men would use these mandates to justify their actions. However, neither man attempted to see if the victim was actually dead. The third man was a Samaritan. The Samaritans lived in northern Israel, but were not Jews by birth. As such, they were considered unclean by the religious leaders and people to be shunned. (John 4:9 is quite specific. “For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.”) Ironically, this was the man, who did what the priest and Levite should have done. It is not the rules that are important, but the heart. If the two greatest rules of Judaism are, “Love the Lord your

God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Deut 6:5), and, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18) as the expert of the law states, then any boundaries that stifle these rules, are not valid and need to be changed. In this case, it was the rules of Levitical purity that needed to become subservient to caring for one’s neighbor. Again, Jesus is opening the boundaries of a rigid, rules-based religious system.

While not all the characteristics of closed systems listed on pages 20 and 21 apply to this story, certainly conformity and obedience to rigid rules (rule #1) does. The punishment for touching a corpse was severe for both the priest and the Levite. The only way that they could have known if the injured man was dead was to touch him. The consequences were too harsh, so they left him to die. Love and care for a fellow human being did not exempt the holy men from harsh judgment. Jesus confronted the rigid rules of the closed religious system and turned the priorities of the Sadducees’ closed religious system upside-down.

Culturally, the Pharisaic family system was not as closed as it could have been if they had completely withdrawn from society. They lived amongst the people and were an integral part of the society. However, they were not as open to cultural changes, as they kept to more traditional Jewish life. Religiously, the Pharisees had lost the values and principles of the original founders of the sect, and consequently had lost sight of why they believed as they did. Matt 23 is an interesting passage. In it, Jesus is speaking to a crowd of people about their religious leaders, and he verbalizes this loss of values. Verses 1-6 are quite specific:

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogue;"; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi'.

In verse 23 Jesus confronts the Pharisee leaders, saying, "You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. However, you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." Jesus is confronting the values of the Pharisees' family system. On the surface they can justify their behavior because they are following the rules. What Jesus is confronting is the heart, the motive, and the values behind the rules.

Fasting, ceremonial ablutions, Sabbath observance were all proper in their place, according to Jesus, but they were not enough. They must be accompanied by evidence of a heart that truly loved the Lord. Conspicuous tassels and phylacteries and long public prayers gave a degree of sanctity to the Pharisees in the eyes of the people, but this must not be confused with true piety before God.<sup>8</sup>

The system was not closed to new believers. It was closed to the heart and mind of God.

The laws regarding ceremonial purity were punctiliously observed by members of the Pharisaic brotherhood. No items of food or drink were to be purchased from a 'sinner,' for fear of ceremonial defilement. For the same reason, a Pharisee might not eat in the house of a 'sinner,' although he might entertain the 'sinner' in his own house. When this was done, however, the Pharisee was required to provide the 'sinner' with clothes to wear, for the 'sinner's' own clothes might be ceremoniously impure... In a sincere desire to make the Law workable within the changing culture of the Greco-roman world, the Pharisaic scribes developed the system of oral tradition, which proved such a burden to Judaism during the time

---

8. Ibid., 596.

of Christ. Beginning with scripture itself, the Pharisees quoted the ‘case decisions’ of famous rabbis who had been consulted concerning the application of Scripture to individual problems. If the revered exegetes of Scripture had expressed an opinion concerning the application or meaning of Scripture, this was given due consideration. Thus the observant Jew was frequently faced with conflicting viewpoints on the nature of correct Sabbath observance, the application of dietary rules to new articles of food, and the multitude of problems with which the legalistic was burdened.<sup>9</sup>

In Matt 23:15, Jesus rubs it in. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.” Legal rules, especially as they were interpreted by a variety of Jewish legal experts, were scrupulously followed by devout followers. The Pharisees reacted differently to the imposed cultural system of Alexander.

To the Pharisees, however, tradition was not simply a commentary upon the Law, but was ultimately raised to the level of Scripture itself... In addition to the charge that traditions had largely made void the intent of the Law, the New Testament makes it clear that the mentality of Pharisaism involved little more than a concern for the minutiae of the Law during the time of Christ. Jesus confronted the Pharisees with Isaiah’s prophecies concerning their legalism. Mark 7:6-8 spells it out. ‘Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:’ ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.’ (Is 29:13) Like many worthy movements, the early piety of those who had separated themselves from impurity at great cost was exchanged for an attitude of pride in the observance of legal precepts.<sup>10</sup>

---

9. Ibid., 595.

10. Ibid., 596.

Reviewing the characteristics of the closed family system as laid out in pages 20 and 21, the Pharisees personify nearly all of the listed elements.

The calling of Matthew in Matt 9:9-13 is an example of Jesus exposing another set of rigid rules in the closed cultural/family system of the Pharisees. He is confronting the Pharisaic religious leaders' habit of excluding large segments of the population because they were considered unclean or undesirable.

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Refer again (p. 30-31) to the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus redefines the concept of 'neighbor.' In the Pharisees' cultural system, there were a number of classes of people who were unclean; gentiles, tax collectors, Samaritans, those infected with illness, etc. "Neighbor" here in this parable is all of mankind, not just those in one's close-knit circle. Jesus makes it very clear that care of people, all people, is more important than religious rules. He does not condemn the rules or obedience to them, but when they take precedence over care of a human being, the care comes first.

There are several instances in Jesus' teachings where this principle comes to the fore: Jesus being confronted by the Pharisees for picking grain on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8), healing on the Sabbath (Matt 12:9-14), and healing the woman with chronic menstrual bleeding touching Jesus' cloak (Matt 9:20-22) are just a few. All of these examples violated behavior or cleanliness rules of the Pharisees. Jesus, however, put

people's needs above the religious establishment's rules. A good example is the case of the Samaritan woman at the well. Here Jesus takes acceptance and redemption to the next level. In John 4:4-26 Jesus violates several of the Pharisaic conventions in the following story.

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."



Within the rigid boundaries of the Pharisaic system, a devout Jewish man would never allow himself to be alone with a woman other than a family member, especially not a Samaritan woman. Nor would he accept water drawn by her, and yet, Jesus does just that. He actually initiates the conversation. Even more in violation of the taboos within the system is the realization that Jesus knows about her promiscuous lifestyle before He initiates the conversation and he still chooses to speak with her. Jesus is opening the system even more. He is not condoning the sin, but is accepting and loving the sinner. The system Jesus is creating is open to everyone who comes to him, regardless of whether or not their past includes sinful behavior or is deemed unacceptable by the religious establishment.

The new system is for those who worship God in spirit and truth, not through rules and rigid behavior systems. It is for all who worship in spirit and truth, not those who wear the accepted religious garments for all mankind to see. The closed system is being rejected, and the open system is being defined. Reviewing the characteristics of the closed family system as laid out in pages 20 and 21, the Pharisees personify nearly all of the listed elements. It is important to note that the rules are in place for a purpose and Jesus does not advocate dispelling with the rules. The lesson is that the rule exists for people, not people for the rules. As Jesus states in Mark 2:27, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

The cultural boundaries were closed in that it sought to preserve its Jewish cultural heritage. The Pharisees lived amongst the people and interacted with them daily. Religiously, the Pharisaic boundaries were much more open than the Sadducees. While it

was true that the first century Pharisees had lost the value system of its originating group, the Hasidim, they were continually interacting with their faith and were bringing in converts to their strict observances. They were not as closed in their religious system as the Sadducees, but Jesus wanted them to be even more open. In the Gospels, we see Jesus attempting to open their system up even more by demanding both the human element be added to their laws, and by adding a personal relationship with the Godhead.

God's relationship with mankind was not originally a relationship of laws, but of love and relationship with boundaries. That had been lost, and it had become a religion of rules rather than love. The rules were closing down the system and Jesus was trying to open it up again. It is important to understand that while Judaism itself survived through the Pharisees, the system that Jesus was teaching had to be continued through the gentiles. The Pharisaic system, while it had a measure of openness, was too closed to allow Jesus' open system to grow. It is in the rest of the New Testament that we begin to see the new system being developed.

#### Paul and the Early Church

The book of Acts transitions between what Jesus himself taught in the Gospels, and what the apostles taught from Jesus' teachings. The rest of the New Testament, the writings of Paul, the apostles and others, begins the process of defining the new system that Jesus had been trying to create in Israel. Unfortunately, the Jewish religious communities were too entrenched in their own traditions to hear the gospel. The rules of faith were changing. The new movement focused, not on a set of rules, but on the person of Jesus Christ and who He said He was. Matt 16:15-16 says it all. "Who do you say I

am?” Jesus asks his disciples. Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

The New Testament develops a corporate appearing systems organization as well as a cultural system resembling a strong family system. The organizational entity of the church is defined. Its goals and values are spelled out. The intended culture is defined, and the criteria for membership are explained. It is all there and the fruits of this plan are seen worldwide today in its many different forms.

The mission statement of this movement is stated in Matt 28:19-20: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” This statement encompasses the essence of the entire movement. It clearly focuses all followers on the task at hand. Throughout the rest of the New Testament, we see how the early Christian believers set out to accomplish the task. This mission statement breaks down the barriers between Jews and non-Jews by targeting “all nations.” Ironically, it validates the Hellenistic leanings of the Sadducees and negates the insular tendencies of the Pharisees. To further enhance the mission statement, Jesus’ last words in Acts 1:8 give the early followers the power to make it happen. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The people who were permitted to become a part of the movement was interesting. The Sadducees embraced the Hellenistic philosophies but rejected its people. The Pharisees rejected both the philosophies and its people. The early Christian

movement in the gentile world welcomed all the people and some of their philosophies. It became apparent very early that all people were accepted. In Acts 2:5-11 we have the scene in Jerusalem forty days after the Jewish festival called Passover at what is now called Pentecost. Peter is speaking to the crowd about Jesus, and the crowd is comprised of many people from distant countries.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!

It is astounding to consider the geographical origins of these people when one considers the travel difficulties of the time. Pontus was north along the Black Sea, Libya and Rome are at the western end of the Mediterranean. The Medes are from the eastern end of the Roman Empire, and the Arabs were from the desert. They may have been Jews or converts to Judaism, which would explain their presence in Jerusalem at this time, but they were not necessarily members of the Jewish sects in Israel at the time, and were open to the new movement. They would have been considered unacceptable by the Sadducees because of their lowly social status, and unclean by the Pharisees. They were not only accepted by Jesus’ followers, but were welcomed with open arms.

Acts 10:9-23 is another very important passage concerning the changing of the rules. It concerns two significant events that are intertwined with each other. The first event is Peter on the roof in Joppa. He went there to pray and became hungry. As his meal was being prepared he fell into a trance. He had a vision, and in the vision he saw a sheet being let down from heaven. On the sheet were all kinds of four-footed animals, reptiles and birds. Peter heard a voice telling him to eat of whatever he wanted. When Peter refused citing the dietary laws (Lev 11), God's response was to say, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

The story is intertwined with the story of Cornelius, the Roman centurion (Acts 10). He and his family were devout followers of Yahweh, a God-fearer. One day he had a vision of an angel of God telling him to send for Peter who was staying in Joppa, not a great distance from where Cornelius was stationed in Caesarea. He did. Peter's vision coincided with the arrival of Cornelius' men at the door. As Peter sat on the rooftop thinking about the significance of his vision, he heard the men at the door. The Spirit told Peter to accompany the men, so he did. When Peter arrived in Caesarea, he greeted Cornelius and those gathered with him. Peter greeted the group. "He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection." (Acts 10:28-29). Peter went on to say, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34-35). Peter spent time talking to them about Jesus and gave an eyewitness account of Jesus' ministry, his death and his resurrection. "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all

who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out, even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.” The Holy Spirit itself was opening the boundaries of the rigid system of the Jews. Cornelius had been a devout believer, but not a Jew. He would have always been an outsider by Jewish standards, but here the Holy Spirit itself had come upon him and those with him. The story continues with Peter saying, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:42-48). The concept that exclusive membership in God’s family is limited to those of Jewish descent is past. The boundaries of this system are being broken down. These passages make it clear that it is being orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, not by a few well-meaning men in the first century.

The corporate structure then becomes defined, as well as leadership styles. The first defining moment of the corporate structure comes in Acts 6. Until this point, as seen in Acts 4:32, “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.” The movement was organized more as a family system, rather than a formal structure. As the number of followers grew, so did the need for a more formal distribution of tasks and responsibilities. In Acts 6:1-7 the following situation is recounted.

In Jerusalem, more and more people were coming to Christ and joining the Christian community. As the numbers grew, more problems arose. Grecian Jews began to complain because it was felt that the Hebraic Jewish widows were getting more attention and a larger quantity of food than the Grecian Jewish widows. The twelve apostles

gathered to discuss the situation. It would have been very easy for the apostles to tell those in charge to be more sensitive to the situation and to keep careful records in order to prove that there was no special treatment. However, that is not what they chose to do. They chose seven men who would oversee the distribution of food. Choosing additional men was not significant. It was who they chose that made the difference. “They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.”

Remember who is complaining: Grecian widows who speak Greek, and who are not part of the Hebraic social system in Jerusalem. The wisdom of the Apostles is shown in whom they selected to care for the widows. The seven men named have Greek names, and therefore, can be assumed to be from outside the Hebraic social system. By naming Greek leaders to deal with the situation with Greek people, it gave non-Hebrews a voice in the movement. It also sent a message to the Greek widows who were complaining, that they had been heard, and had taken action. Authority is now established by position and function, rather than by ethnic background.

From the standpoint of a corporate system structure, this is crucial in defining the new value system of the movement. The Apostles moved the influence of leadership from a Hebraic-driven authority system to an all-encompassing authority system comprised of both Hebraic and Grecian leaders. Authority is not based on following a specific set of religious rules, nor is it by birth or ethnicity, but by a godly response to faith and a heart-filled love of God and mankind. Decisions were being made that were forming an organizational structure with the culture of an open system.

One of the characteristics of an open system in both organizational and family systems is that individuals are given the freedom to grow and develop the skills they have been given. The concept of spiritual gifts addresses this issue. In 1 Cor 12 and 14, Paul talks about one body with many parts, that each part has a separate purpose, but all work together for the good of the whole. Each part has a role and is expected to fill it. Rom 12:6-8 also spells it out.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

If the system is to work well, each member is to be considered necessary for the good of the whole and without any part the system has difficulty. It was important that the system be open enough to recognize gifts and skill sets and utilize the people as they appeared. There is no place that makes it clearer what happens when leaders work together than in 1 Cor 3:6. Paul is talking about the church in Corinth. "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." No one person can do everything and without God's help nothing succeeds.

The family system of the early Christian movement is more open than that of the Jewish sects of the first-century AD. While the Sadducees sought personal power and a rigid religious system, and the Pharisees were bound by legalism and exclusiveness, the Christian movement focused on love for one another and an individual's relationship with Jesus Christ. Relationships are a key element in the Christian family system, and succeeding in these relationships depends on the character of each person.



The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:29 put very few rules on non-Jews. All that was required was “to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.” Although circumcision was a key symbol in Judaism and the covenant with Abraham, it had become a symbol of legalism, not covenant (Gal 5:2). What was required in this new movement was quite different.

The family values embraced by the newly-developing Christian movement are strong and clear. There is a strong focus on character building. In Jas 3, Christians are admonished to control their tongues – not to gossip, speak badly of someone, or to be divisive. In 1 Cor 6 Christians are told not to sue each other, but to work things out between themselves; be faithful to your spouse (1 Cor 6); work towards Christ-like behaviors (Phil 2:12-13); seek a spiritual heart with the results showing “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). Other desired character traits include humility and other-centered (Phil 2:1-4); productive (1 Thess 3:6-14); treat everyone equally (Jas 2); and loving one another (1 John 1:9). These are not rules for salvation, but character traits that Christians are expected to embrace as they work to become more Christ-like.

The open system that was being promoted by the Christian leaders encouraged each individual to embrace the above personal traits, and then to participate in the larger context. Characteristics of open systems include words such as democratic, flexible, nurturing, freedom-granting. Nowhere is this spelled out more clearly in the new Christian movement than in Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12. The premise of these two chapters is that each person is created with a different set of skills and talents. God intentionally created each person to be unique (Ps 139:13). Each person is expected to develop the

gifts and talents that God has given them, and then use them to work for the glory of God's kingdom, together with others who are different with different skills and talents who were also created by God to work for the glory of God's kingdom. In 1 Cor 12:12-31 Paul says that "The body [*of believers*] is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." (1 Cor 12:12). Membership into the body of Christ is no longer exclusive. It is being opened to up to all people of all races. Paul goes on to say, "But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor 12:24-25). This passage is further clarification that the Holy Spirit is opening up the system of the Jews.

Their system was closed through exclusive membership rules; through specific traditional practices, i.e., circumcision and rigid dietary laws; and through the rigid interpretation of ancient laws and traditions. The new open system was based on inclusive membership through baptism of the Holy Spirit, not by nationality or ethnicity. Each person has value and importance and is of equal status. Love and care is to be extended to all parts. "Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given

greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other” (1 Cor 12:23-25).

The boundaries are opening up and the rules are changing. Closed systems controlled by rigid rules, values and expectations, gender restrictions, and other forbidding attitudes do not follow from passages like these. As we saw in the words of Isaiah (Isa 29:13), these rules may seem to be from God, but they are actually rules of men.

Closed systems have little room for mistakes and do not tolerate disobedience of the rules. The most revolutionary concept that Jesus introduced to the world was that of forgiveness. Forgiveness allows everyone to let go of personal grievances and move on, both internally and in outward relationships. Christianity focuses on relationships with people and with Jesus Christ. Forgiveness is a key element that promotes relationships. There are many passages in scripture that emphasize that if Christians are not willing to forgive those who have injured them, then God the Father and Jesus the Son is not willing to forgive the believer (Matt 6:14-15, 18:35; Mark 11:25; Luke 17:3; Col 3:13; 1 John 1:9). Without an attitude of forgiveness, the resulting stress that accompanies unforgiveness can destroy a person from within, and break up important relationships that an individual has. With forgiveness comes redemption of the wayward. Redemption and forgiveness are two concepts prominent in open family systems as well as in Christianity. Closed systems also have the concept of redemption and forgiveness but the process is very different. Rather than the grace and love given in an open system the process in a closed system has conditions attached, mandates that must be followed and then the sinner will be judged on whether or not forgiveness should be bestowed. It is a

forgiveness of works, a process of earning the right to be forgiven, rather than in grace and love.

The cultural/family system of Christianity is based on an individual's responsibility for one's own character and morals. It is not based on "what comes naturally" as a member of the human race, but on working to become more Christ-like in interpersonal relationships. It is through personal actions rather than outside symbols such as prayer shawls or dress, that demonstrates Christian faith. It is through having boundaries, but the culture within the systems allows for forgiveness, love, redemption and personal growth, in other words an open system.

Paul further emphasizes the openness of the system in Gal 5:1. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" referring to the rules of the religious establishment of the first century. In 1 Cor 6:12, "Everything is permissible for me — but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me — but I will not be mastered by anything." While the boundaries may seem to be wide open, they are not. There are expectations and rules. However, obedience to the rules is done because of love for Jesus Christ, not fear of punishment, reprisals, and damnation. When members of this new cultural/family system are committed to the system, there is freedom in faith, but everyone is encouraged to develop his or her own character. Each member is expected to become more Christ-like, and must take the responsibility of his or her own actions. Each member must take responsibility for the choices that he or she makes. The rules are not imposed as a condition of salvation, but as a reflection of truly belonging to the family.

The open system culture of the Christian movement is based on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and relationships with other people; the personal character of each individual and their desire to work to become more Christ-like; and the willingness of each individual to forgive each other for perceived transgressions and attempt to live in harmony with others within the body of Christ. There are understood rules such as the Ten Commandments (Exod 20) but the heart of the individual and the desire for deep personal relationships take precedence. The rules are guidelines for life, not a means to salvation. The individualism of the Greek world is exemplified in the attitude of personal responsibility of the individual for one's own behavior, and the community of the Jewish world is stressed in the relationships between the individual and his or her neighbor, whoever that may be. The overarching component is the everlasting relationship with Jesus Christ.

### Summary and Conclusion

God used the forty years from the time that Moses led the Jews out of Egypt to the time that they entered Canaan to begin to create the culture of the Jewish people. Rules were necessary at the beginning because these people were in actuality Egyptians of Jewish descent and the Jewish culture had not been established. The rules established guidelines for living, and spelled out expectations, which are found in the book of Leviticus. Over time, as maturity developed in the people, the boundaries relaxed. However, the boundaries eventually were ignored, and the culture stagnated. After the

Babylonian exile, the rules were reinstituted and became the defining point of salvation for the Jewish religious community.

The nation into which Jesus was born embodied two different closed systems, each with their own strategies for survival in the midst of the Greco-Roman culture. Jesus and his apostles preached and lived a different life, granting freedom and love in an open system that welcomed all mankind. Because of mankind's tendencies towards closed systems in the face of outside cultural stresses, over time the Jewish nation had become extremely legalistic. The rites of circumcision, the dietary laws, and the rules of the Sabbath had become millstones around their necks, and the love of God and the love and care for each other that God desired for us was lost. By seeing how Jesus confronted the virtually closed systems of the Sadducees and Pharisees in the New Testament we as 21<sup>st</sup> century believers can see the open system that Jesus sought to bring to his followers. The freedom, love, joy and grace bestowed on us is unfathomable. In the open system, each believer has value, is loved and is encouraged to be the person that God intended, not just some menial servant who must only do as he or she is told. An open system full of love and acceptance with reasonable boundaries respected out of love is the cultural system that Jesus wants for all his people. In Christianity, God brings us back to His desired relationship with us. God originally designed an open system for mankind, operating more as a family than as an organization.

In the following case study, a closed system similar to the Pharisaic closed system will be presented as it existed in today's society. Jesus may have tried to relax the legalistic boundaries in the religious community of first century, but there are those today

who find the closed, rigid system comfortable and secure, regardless of its impact on others.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to put systems theory in perspective and to examine how the literature applies systems analysis to the organizational structure and culture of organizations. The first body of literature deals with corporate systems, and how systems theory translates to the business world. The second body of literature looks at organizations who view themselves as operating as a large family. Systems theory was being developed concurrently in psychological circles to assist in counselors in family therapy. Many of the family therapy principles also concern organizations, which choose to act as families; in these cases, corporate, and family systems thinking has become intertwined. Corporate systems thinking demonstrates how an organization's culture also affects its systems, and whether the systems remain open or closed. As seen in the previous chapter, open systems have a biblical model in Christian organizations.

Systems thinking and analysis is a tool to be used in identifying problems and exposing unhealthy cultures as well as creating healthy cultures and establishing healthy patterns. In this light, it will be revealed how both corporate and family systems thinking can effectively be applied to a church (or any other Christian organization) in order to make it healthy.



Systems theory had its beginnings in the 1940s, when a group of university professors in various disciplines began to voice the idea that looking at individual pieces of a whole may not necessarily give understanding of the whole. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a biologist, wrote a book entitled *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*.<sup>1</sup> The Josiah Macy, Jr. foundation sponsored a number of conferences in the 1940s and early 1950s for leading scientists in a wide variety of disciplines, for the purpose of investigating and developing systems theory with an interdisciplinary approach. The Macy Conferences developed a language of communication between disciplines that began a meaningful dialogue. The original disciplines represented included mathematicians, anthropologists, biologists, sociologists, psychologists, psychiatrists and others. The theory was embraced by many different fields, and as a result, the quantity of literature on systems theory has grown and is growing rapidly.

### Corporate Systems Theory

At the close of World War II, W. Edwards Deming emerged as an American consultant to Japanese business in the rebuilding of Japan. By 1950, he had become extremely well known in Japan for his effectiveness in changing corporate culture by bringing a spirit of cooperation into the intensely competitive Japanese corporate culture. He was able to bring a strong corporate economic climate to Japan and

---

1. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*. (New York: George Braziller, 1968).

produce high quality goods in an efficient manner, allowing Japan to surpass the United States in production, quality of goods, and profitability.

In his book, *The New Economics for Industry, Government, Education*, W. Edwards Deming proposed bringing a new system into the business culture. He called it a “system of profound knowledge.” Deming defined this as “a network of interdependent components that work together to try to accomplish the aim of the system.”<sup>2</sup> Deming’s ideas captured the attention of others, such as Jay Forrester and Peter Senge, both at MIT’s Sloan School of Management. These two men fully developed systems theory as it applies to running a business.<sup>3</sup> Rather than having each division compete with each other for success, which creates an environment of winners vs. losers, a systems approach encourages the employees to cooperate between departments at many levels, for the good of the whole company. Systems thinking is leading business leaders into valuing more of a team style of corporate leadership. This movement has evolved into a systems approach to leadership and management in business in America today.

Systems theory is especially useful in identifying problems in corporate structures that affect product or service viability in the marketplace. Jamshid Gharajedaghi, a well-respected leader in systems thinking, reminds us that, “As a

---

2. W. Edwards Deming, *The New Economics for Industry, Government, Education* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 1994), 50.

3. Jay Forrester was a pioneer in early systems thinking. He has written several books and articles on the subject. *Principles of Systems* (Waltham, MA: Pegasus Communications, 1968) was one of his early books on systems theory. Peter Senge is best known for his work on learning organizations called *The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990.

purposeful system, an organization is part of a larger, purposeful whole, the society.”<sup>4</sup> Corporations must be ever mindful that they do not exist in a vacuum; their purpose is to fill a need: “Effective integration of multilevel purposeful systems requires that the fulfillment of a purposeful part’s desires depend on fulfillment of the larger system’s requirements, and vice versa. In this context, the purpose of an organization is to serve the purposes of its members while also serving the purposes of its environment.”<sup>5</sup> Systems theory also helps identify problems within a corporation in order to find and implement solutions to those problems, thereby helping the corporation fulfill its purpose in general society.

Below is a chart that compares the two styles of thinking, linear and systems. It highlights the glaring differences of how leaders view the parts of the organization, and the consequences of choosing one style over the other. Linear thinking dwells on one cause of a problem, one flaw in the organization, or only one part needing to be changed. Corporate systems theory looks at the whole and how the relationships need to be revised, rather than limiting a leader’s vision to a particular source.

---

4. Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2006.) 12.

5. Ibid.

## A Comparison of Two Ways of Thinking: Separate Parts and the System

### Separate Parts Thinking

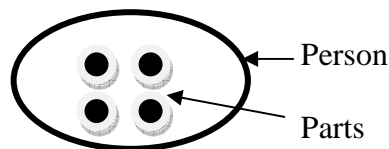
Atomistic

Problems belong to the individual

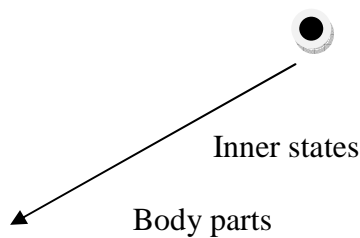
Problems are intra (within a part)

Whole can be understood by reduction into parts

Parts explain the whole



Understanding comes from breaking down into smaller and smaller pieces



A part can be understood by itself

Think in lines A – B – C – D

Cause and effect thinking

### System thinking

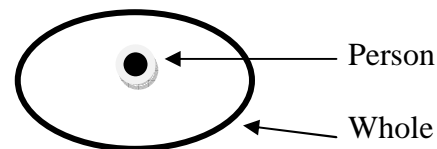
Wholistic

Problems belong to the system

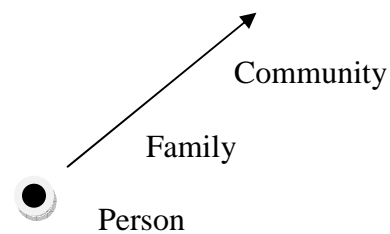
Problems are inter (between parts)

Whole can be understood by interaction of the parts

Whole explains parts

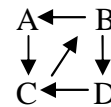


Understanding comes from looking up (larger and larger wholes)



Parts mutually influence one another

Think in loops



Co-causal

Figure 3.1<sup>6</sup> Comparison chart: linear vs. systems analysis

6. Peter Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (1996: The Alban Institute, Herndon, VA), 11.

## Family Systems Theory

Systems theory is also used in family therapy. One of the foremost pioneers was Virginia Satir, who brought this revolutionary approach to family therapy in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>7</sup> Family therapy not only works with individuals within a particular family, but also recognizes the relationships between members of the family and the family's spoken and unspoken rules. "Instead of assuming that the causes of a particular psychological problem are apt to be found primarily in the individual psyche, psychologists began asking whether the causes may not lie in the relational patterns that exist among family members over time."<sup>8</sup> Family therapists now tend to focus on how patterns of interaction between family members maintain the problem rather than trying to identify the cause, as this can be perceived as blaming individuals within the family. "From here it was only a short step to viewing any person brought by a family to a therapist as merely the identified patient. The identified patient is the one that the family claims is sick, when in reality the family as a whole needs care. So family therapists began treating whole families as patients."<sup>9</sup> At the present time, family therapists assume that the family as a whole is larger than the sum of its parts.

---

7. Virginia Satir. *Peoplemaking* (Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, 1972).

8. Cosgrove and Hatfield, 19.

9. Ibid.

### Systems Theory in Organizations that Act as Families

The image of family for a body of believers is a common theme in the Bible and that image is used today. It is not uncommon to hear, “We are members of God’s family” or “Our church is one big extended family.” Gal 5:10 says, “Let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” The language of family and the relationships associated within a family are often applied to churches and Christian organizations such as schools, because of this language in the New Testament. Virginia Satir describes it this way: “Institutions such as schools, churches, businesses, and government are, by and large, extensions of family forms to non-family forms.”<sup>10</sup> These organizations often pride themselves on operating as a family, without understanding the dynamics of the nuclear family. Consequently, they find themselves violating the personal boundaries of their members and imposing unrealistic expectations of behavior on their constituents. “The church is the family of God, with all the different happy and unhappy forms of family life that human beings are able to invent for themselves.”<sup>11</sup>

Peter Steinke has written two very helpful books that apply family systems theory to churches. In his book, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*, he lays the groundwork for applying systems theory to churches: “The church family structure is often more powerful than the official church structure embodied in offices and boards. A congregational family

---

10. Satir, 290.

11. Cosgrove and Hatfield, 13.

systems model provides a means of discovering this informal family structure behind the official structure.”<sup>12</sup> Churches, by nature, encourage interdependence, and because of this, it is extraordinarily useful to use family systems thinking when trying to discover the informal structure of a church. “Reality is more complex than a tidy theory. Nevertheless, a theory helps us to organize complexity. From a point of reference, we put the forces at play into a coherent pattern. We see how things are connected; we make sense of what is happening, and we become more aware of how we might respond and where we might aim our efforts. Systems theory is a way of conceptualizing reality. It organizes our thinking from a specific vantage point. System thinking considers the interrelatedness of the part.”<sup>13</sup> Using this idea, diagram 1.4 on page 8 demonstrates the importance of this concept. This model is a powerful tool that can be used to diagram many different issues. In this particular instance, the diagram is being used to identify sources of influence in the church family. It can be used to diagram sources of conflict, sources of power, or sources of unrest; whatever the issue is, its sources can now be diagrammed.

Edwin H. Friedman integrates the corporate systems philosophy with those organizations that operate more as large families rather than impersonal corporate entities. He puts it this way. “[Systems thinking] focuses less on content and more on the process that governs data; less on the cause-and-effect connections that link bits of information and more on the principles of organizations that give data meaning... The components do not function according to their “nature” but according to their position in the network. It is the structure that becomes the unit of study...Family

---

12. Peter Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1993), 24.

13. *Ibid.*, 3.

theory maintains that such focus on the systemic forces of the emotional process rather than on the content of specific symptoms is just as applicable.”<sup>14</sup> What Friedman is stressing is that by analyzing patterns of behavior rather than examining each behavioral event, it is possible to get a clear picture of understanding of the issues without knowing every event. This is consistent with Anderson and Johnson’s approach to systems thinking in organizations.<sup>15</sup> In organizations that operate as families, the patterns are more useful in understanding the system rather than continually waiting for more data or events in order to point blame.

### Culture

As seen above, Steinke and Friedman use family systems principles and apply them to those Christian organizations who view themselves as the personification of the family of God, i.e., churches and Christian schools. Corporate systems thinkers, such as Harold Johnson and Edgar Schein, often use principles of family systems in order to understand the corporate cultures of business organizations.

Culture is an intangible part of any organization and is an integral part of any organizational system. Culture can be defined as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive,

---

14. Friedman, Edwin H, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 15-17.

15. Anderson and Johnson, 8.



think, and feel in relation to those problems.”<sup>16</sup> “Culture formation is always, by definition, a striving toward patterning and integration, even though in many groups their actual history of experiences prevents them from ever achieving a clear-cut, unambiguous paradigm.”<sup>17</sup> All those in the group relationship have a shared history and vested interest in promoting the culture. Within the concept of culture, one includes not only norms, values, behavior patterns, rituals and traditions, etc., but Schein comments that the word “culture,” while it includes the elements above, also implies other critical elements such as structural stability, depth, breadth, patterning, or integration.<sup>18</sup> It is through the principles of family systems that one analyzes corporate culture.

Harold Johnson tells the following story in his book *Mentoring for Exceptional Performance*. He had been invited to become the CEO of a company that owned thirteen cable television franchises:

It was operated by an entrepreneur who had started with virtually nothing and had created a very valuable business over about a twenty-year period. In the last three or four years, through acquisition of additional franchises, the business had grown rapidly. When I arrived, management was in disarray because the entrepreneur was spending more time looking at international opportunities than in running the business. Which was why he hired me – to provide basic general management of this fundamentally sound business.

What I discovered was that the business was experiencing an extremely tight cash flow because of rapid growth. Further complicating matters was the fact that the rapid growth was being handled in an unsophisticated manner. The business had been divided into three basic departments – Finance, Operations, and Sales and Service. Unfortunately, the system that was being constructed to distribute the cable television signals was not in accordance with programming that customers were ordering. The electronic components being

---

16. Schein, Edgar H, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 17.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 4.

ordered by operations engineers generated the wrong frequencies to deliver the programming being ordered by the programming staff. The level of knowledge and expertise required to coordinate the more complex activities of this growing, technically oriented business exceeded the skills of those with responsibility for executing the tasks. The business demands had exceeded the managers' knowledge and skills.<sup>19</sup>

Johnson tackled the problems by taking a systems approach.

“To solve the problems, a very systematic approach was taken. Key management changes were made to assure that skilled managers were focusing on critical functions. The beginnings of a management team emerged. Next the critical systems that supported the key functions were documented and evaluated. Then we asked, ‘What else can we do to make it better?’ It became fun to show up and take on the next challenge. The business results became more predictable and more positive.”<sup>20</sup>

By seeing and understanding the impact of the changes in relationships between various parts, he was better able to see and understand the whole.

Looking at the situation through the lens of systems analysis, it became clear very quickly that the sales and operations departments were not communicating. Consequently, the company could not meet the expectations of its customers. It was also clear that the company training program was inadequate. Its employees were not technologically current enough to sustain the company's market share in its sector of the economy. By looking across departmental lines, it was possible to see the problems. If Johnson had limited his examination to looking at departments only, the problems would not have surfaced, because the problems lay in the communication between departments, not within the departments. Johnson also began to change the

---

19. Johnson, Harold, *Mentoring for Exceptional Performance* (Glendale, CA: Griffin Publishing, 1997), 22-23.

20. Ibid., 23-24.

management style of the company by developing a management team, rather than by asking each department head to work independently of the others.

The systems approach exposed a large hole in Johnson's new corporation: the entire department of Marketing and Sales was not fulfilling its function. The primary functions of the department of Marketing and Sales are to communicate the products of the company to the outside world, and to communicate the desires and needs of the outside world to the company internally, for better product development. The structure of the company did not seem to provide an opportunity for this internal communication to occur. By creating the management team, a forum was put in place through which the department heads could dialogue about issues that affected more than just their individual departments. The closed system approach within each department was preventing the company as a whole from moving forward well. When the team approach was adopted, and a more open internal system was put into place, the company began to operate as a cohesive entity and became more effective in the outside world.

In order to explain the importance of corporate culture to the functioning of an organization, Edgar Schein relates the story of his time as a consultant at Digital Equipment Company (DEC). When Schein visited the DEC corporate headquarters in Marlboro, MA, for the first time, he entered the front doors, approached the desk, and gave his name. He was asked to take a seat in the waiting area. The furniture was functional but not impressive. As he examined his surroundings he noticed,

The ubiquitous open office architecture, the extreme informality of dress and manners, a very dynamic environment in the sense of rapid pace, and a high rate of interaction among employees, seemingly reflecting enthusiasm,

intensity, energy, and impatience. As I would pass cubicles or conference rooms, I would get the impression of openness. There were very few doors.<sup>21</sup>

It was functional, not fancy. Informal clothing made it difficult to determine rank. He had been brought to DEC to improve communication and group effectiveness. He began to attend meetings, only to find what seemed to be a “high level of interpersonal confrontation, argumentativeness, and conflict.” There seemed to be intense emotional arguments and anger at each other with no provocation, yet hostility did not extend beyond the meeting. Status meant nothing and senior members argued with Ken Olsen, the president of the company, as much as they did with each other. It seemed to Schein that he was observing a dysfunctional senior management team. However, all meetings at all levels were conducted in a similar manner, which was puzzling. The company was organized along functional units and product lines. Hierarchy was viewed as a convenience but the communication hierarchy, committee meetings and their outcomes, were taken very seriously. It seemed chaotic.

Through systems analysis, by talking with employees and examining patterns of behaviors, etc., Schein was able to gain an understanding of the culture of DEC. He then was able to identify some unspoken values. This was a technical company, started by engineers, run by engineers, and had a culture that respected engineering values. It thrived on invention and innovation. One of the core values had to do with personal responsibility. If one proposed something and the proposal was accepted, the individual had the responsibility to make it happen. The phrase “He who proposes,

---

21. Ibid., 40.

does” was a common refrain. Another rule was you should not do things without a “buy-in” from others, who would then be part of the implementing team. One had to balance being individualistic and being a team player. In order to get the “buy-in,” one had to convince others of the merits of the idea, hence the confrontations and seeming arguments at meeting. Viability of projects was determined through debate. This was a part of DEC’s culture that seemed dysfunctional from the outside, but, with the understanding gained through systems analysis, suddenly made sense.

Schein discovered more corporate values at DEC through systems analysis that defined the culture even more clearly. These values included honesty, hard work, and high standards of personal morality, professionalism, personal responsibility, truthfulness, and integrity. These were more important than position or authority. DEC “viewed [its] culture as a great asset and felt that the culture itself had to be taught to all new employees.”<sup>22</sup> Healthy systems and healthy cultures may not necessarily be determined through casual observation. By applying practices consistent with figure 1.1 (page 5), and by identifying what seemed to be unhealthy events on the surface (arguments and confrontations in meetings), it was possible to identify patterns that were consistent with the events (a pattern of deep friendship and camaraderie after a contentious meeting, which otherwise seemed inconsistent with the relatively hostile nature of the meetings, and therefore required an alternate interpretation). This led to an understanding of the structure of the corporation and the importance of the culture in the workplace.

---

22. Ibid., 40-45.

## Combining Systems Thinking to Effect Healthy Change

Senge takes this entire concept of systems analysis and applies it to implementing change in organizations. “Learning to see underlying “structures” rather than “events” is a starting point [for high leverage changes]. Thinking in terms of processes of change rather than “snapshots” is another.”<sup>23</sup> He has an interesting phrase that sums up all of the difficulties in using systems analysis for problem identification and solution making. He says that it is necessary to develop “the art of seeing the forest and the trees.”<sup>24</sup> He says that when most people step back they mostly see more trees. This is why viewing structures points to the future, and why viewing events and patterns points to the present (see figure 1.5, page 10). The events are the trees; patterns are more trees, and one can even limit the search to a specific species of trees; but structures are the whole forest.

Steinke’s view is that when an organization operates as a family, it faces many of the same issues that a family does. In order to function well, a living organism needs to be healthy. Health is a desired state, but health is maintained because of the response of the body to ill health. In other words, a cybernetic system is needed to maintain health. The human body is equipped with an immune system to fight off disease. With the medicine and other medical procedures that are available today, it is often the response of the individual that is significant to the health of the individual. Does the person seek a doctor’s advice? Are the right medicines prescribed and taken? Is surgery done in a timely manner or is it postponed too long? The proper

---

23. Senge, 65.

24. Ibid., 127.

response to ill health promotes health, and the improper response fosters ill health (and, in the extreme case, death). If a family that is not healthy seeks help from a “family health specialist” and follows the prescription given, there is a good chance that the family will become healthy. It is usually the parents in the family that seek the help when necessary, and it is the parents who implement the health-giving procedures within the family.

Steinke discusses the health of an organization in much the same language that a therapist would discuss the health of a family. “More important to [organizations] than any of the conditions they face is the capacity of their leaders to make clear and effective responses to the conditions.”<sup>25</sup> He goes on to identify seven attributes of healthy organizations:

Sense of purpose

Appraisal and management of conflict

Clarity

Mood and tone

Mature interaction

Healing capacity

Focusing on resources<sup>26</sup>

Organizations with a sense of purpose have a clear direction. In today’s world most successful organizations have a vision statement or a purpose statement. “They have a working vision that conveys the message that together they can influence their

---

25. Peter Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, 26.

26. Ibid.

future.”<sup>27</sup> Steinke makes a significant point when he says, “The vision needs to be realistic yet challenging. People will hesitate to follow leaders who avoid stressful conditions and will not take clear action. Leaders create conditions that make something new possible.”<sup>28</sup> However, in today’s environment, it is common to find organizations that have written a purpose statement or defined their mission, yet treat it only as an intellectual exercise. The mission or purpose statement, after being drafted, is then put on the shelf and forgotten. It has no relevance in the actual day-to-day operations of the organization.

### The Cultural Impact of Open vs. Closed Systems

In any entity, whether it is an organization or a family, one of the bonds woven into the fabric of the culture is relationships. Where there are relationships, there will be conflict. How well an organization handles its conflict determines its health. Healthy organizations do not let conflicts fester. “They have the wisdom to face the tensions and stresses that befall all living systems.”<sup>29</sup> When the individuals in the organization are able to understand that relationships will work out, that as individuals their role is secure, and that the organization will work out its issues, they become less anxious. “This sense of coherence gives people a compass, builds confidence that things will work out, and contributes to the belief that the person can positively influence the outcome.”<sup>30</sup>

---

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 27.



This writer believes that when a cultural system becomes too isolated, the system becomes unhealthy and subsequently destructive. As a closed, isolated system, an organization loses its ability to integrate new and unfamiliar information, because it becomes even more resistant when it feels the new information threatens the system – yet it may remain quite stable. Stability becomes more important than the development of its people, its impact on outside environments, or fulfilling its stated vision and mission. This writer believes that, when the leaders of a Christian organization are committed to growing their people and developing the organization's positive influence on the surrounding environment, a healthy open system will be intentionally implemented to foster such a culture. Through continual feedback and assessment, an organization can retain its balance while maintaining its relevance. The open system provides a win/win situation both for those working towards the goal and for the organization as a whole. Those in the trenches have opportunities to participate in ways that make key contributions to the organization as a whole, allowing the organization to flourish in all areas.

Organizations, too, function well when they attend to the health of processes. In a systems approach, the growth process that receives major attention is the person's capacity to be a self in a relationship system – to grow as a mature person... Healthy congregations are obviously invested in the growth of people. They are not devoted to how people failed or who is to blame. If invested in growth, healthy congregations will have leaders devoted to learning.<sup>31</sup>

The healthy organization as defined above is consistent with an open cultural system.

Whether applied to for-profit organizations, to non-profit organizations, or to families, the literature is consistent: open systems are more desirable, both for an

---

31. Ibid., 31.

organization or family, and for its members. An open system does not mean “anything goes.” There is a need for well-defined, porous boundaries; a well-defined and well-implemented direction and vision for the organization, or in the case of a family, a well-defined value system that is communicated to all. This provides room for each member to grow and develop their own skills and talents, and allows freedom to learn from mistakes without harsh, punitive reprisal.

### Conclusion

The literature in this chapter brings to the reader a sense that systems analysis can be applied to varying types of organizations, whether they be large business corporations or small churches. The same principles apply regardless of the size or purpose of the organization. Steinke says it best when he says that systems theory is way of conceptualizing reality.<sup>32</sup> It makes sense out of small chunks of seemingly irrelevant bits and pieces of information or “events.” Anderson and Johnson’s pyramid approach provides a framework for evaluating and categorizing information. The pyramid approach also allows the leader or consultant a way of conceptualizing the existing system, and then provides a process through which they can reach meaningful solutions. It is this process through which problems are uncovered. It is also through this process that relational patterns are revealed. Relational patterns are as important as procedural patterns and must be understood in a meaningful way if problems are to be fully resolved.

---

32. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*. 24.

Corporate systems philosophy not only can be applied to large international companies, but also to groups who choose to operate more like a family and less like an impersonal conglomerate. Organizations that operate as families depend on interpersonal relationships to provide community and give care. However, it is often difficult to do this in a way that respects personal boundaries, and yet, acknowledges relationship. Establishing proper boundaries and recognizing when boundaries are violated can be ascertained through systems analysis.

The culture of a group of people is one of those intangibles that sets groups apart, and can often control the health of the group. It is the culture that defines the stability of the group, and it is through family systems that the characteristics of the culture are revealed. Some cultures are more open to developing its members than others. Those systems that are open allow its members to grow, develop, and thrive in areas that interest them or in which they have the necessary talents. Those systems that are more closed to allowing its members to be individuals, or limit their input from the external environment, often provide unhealthy internal environments for their members. As was seen earlier, Jesus promoted a more open system that allowed room for all people, regardless of their background or their abilities.

The proceeding chapters have presented the theory of systems analysis, a discussion of the literature that presents various applications of systems theory, and an examination of scripture through the lens of systems analysis. The following section presents a case study, in which systems analysis was used to identify existing problems in a Christian school in New Hampshire. This study will present patterns that were revealed through interviews with church leaders, school administrators,

teachers, parents, and students. It will then present solutions that were implemented and the rationale behind those decisions. Also presented will be the role that culture played in how the system reacted to the recommended and/or implemented changes as it sought to regain a sense of stability or homeostasis. The consequences that can occur because of the need of the system to achieve perceived stability will also be presented, and the current status of the school, as a result of the perceived attack on the existing system, will be revealed.

## Chapter 4

### Methodology: A Retrospective Analysis Case Study

Case studies are an accepted way to tell real world stories in such a way as to promote learning in a variety of disciplines; for example, processing and organizing information, developing skills needed in decision making, using existing data to develop a strategic plan, and learning other strategic skills. “Case studies form an important pedagogical tool in many fields of study...Cases also provide the data for in-depth traditional research, and are particularly useful for exploring causality and other linkages behind survey data.”<sup>1</sup> Case studies are more than bullets that highlight certain identified issues. They are designed to “show the links between theory and actual occurrences...”<sup>2</sup> However, there must be an objective in developing a case study for it to make sense.”<sup>2</sup> “Case studies also allow researchers to place the study in the context of the environment in which it occurs.”<sup>3</sup>

There are different styles and purposes for case studies. Consequently, when the writer decides to write a case study, it is important to determine the purpose of the study and understand how it will be used before it is written. It may be written for the purpose of testing a hypothesis or communicating research results. A decision case study may be written for the express purpose of building a case around a stated decision.<sup>4</sup> Another

---

1. William Naumes and Margaret Naumes, *The Art & Craft of Case Writing* (Armonk, NY:M.E. Sharpe, 2006) 3.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 64.

4. William Ellet *The Case Study Handbook* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2007), 135.

category of case studies is one that focuses on problems that may not be fully understood, but the fact that there is a problem is known. This case study is often difficult to write because it simply describes a situation in which the writer may or may not know how to identify the problem. However, it is an important tool to clarifying the issues. Another type of case study is one that evaluates judgments that have been made. The case study evaluates the data, examines decisions that were based on the data and include extenuating circumstances that impact the decisions and judgments. A case study also may be written as a teaching tool to meet a need in a syllabus. Position papers may also be considered a specialized form of a case study. Case studies are written for many reasons for a variety of reasons but the common denominator is that they allow people to interact with the information presented in a manner that promotes learning, decision making or compiling information in a manner that makes the information applicable. There are seven key factors that allow a case study researcher to organize material successfully.

1. The ability to focus on issues and subjects
2. The ability to focus on the dynamic interaction of the situation
3. The ability to study a situation at a point in time
4. The ability to study a series of actions over a period of time
5. The ability to study aspects of a situation
6. The ability to probe a situation in depth
7. The ability to corroborate theories<sup>5</sup>

---

5. Naumes and Naumes, 63. The list is referenced as coming from a working paper by E.A. Bock, *Improving the Usefulness of the Case Study in Political Science* (Syracuse, NY: Inter-University case), 5-18.

While the list originally was compiled to guide political science researchers as they gathered information to put into a case study, this list is a useful tool for all case study writers. The list gives structure to the case study and gives guidance to the writer as the writer organizes the information.

When faced with the task of identifying problems and then providing options for possible solution, it is not unusual to do the interviews first and design the case study afterwards. This was the case with New Hampshire Christian School, and the overseeing church, Grace Bible Church.

The elders of Grace Bible Church asked a consultant to help them work with New Hampshire Christian School (NHCS), a school for which they were responsible. The elders made this request because New Hampshire Christian School was experiencing dropping admissions numbers, and remained financially dependent on the church. The consultant is the writer of this case study, and personally conducted all the interviews. The work of a consultant requires an open mind and a willingness to adjust expectations should the fact-finding process lead to unexpected conclusions. This is equally true for case studies. When a consultant gathers information for a client, it is important that he or she keep an open mind and be willing to follow the information wherever it leads. In case studies, the same requirement is necessary. The researcher may have preconceived ideas about the ultimate conclusion will be, but be willing to adjust those expectations if the information leads elsewhere.

The methodology used in this research is a single case study using retrospective analysis. "Research case studies take the form of a semi-structured interview, where the interviewer has a minimum level of questions for which responses are to be elicited from

the individuals familiar with the situation being studied. It is the role of the case writer to gather information from the semi-structured interview without leading the individuals in their responses.”<sup>6</sup> The data used for the analysis was collected through interviews with parents (including those who had removed their children from the school), teachers, students, administrators, school board members, and elders of the overseeing church. While there was not a formal questionnaire, the interviews began with three generic questions. These questions were:

- What is good about the school, or in the case of parents, why do you send your children to NHCS?
- Are there areas that frustrate you about the school?
- What would you like to see changed?

The interviewer/writer listened carefully, and followed a line of questioning based on the direction in which the interviewee led the conversation. The interview process began with the expectation that the school’s troubles were the result of financial instability caused by accepting too many lower income families who could not afford higher tuition. This proved to be only partially true. While there were some families who could not pay tuition, (more than there should have been), this was not the source of the problem. Through nearly 100 interviews, what emerged was a highly dysfunctional organizational and cultural system that created and encouraged the financial problems and low admissions.

A case study that focuses on problem definition is organized in a specific format. “A *problem... requires a diagnosis based on cause and effect analysis. A diagnosis is a summary statement of the important causes. The problem situation in a case presents*

---

6. Ibid., 65.



effects as well as information and data that make possible the diagnosis and a causal explanation: these causes acted in a certain way to produce these effects.<sup>7</sup> The five elements include:

1. Problem definition
2. Diagnosis
3. Cause-effect analysis
4. Concepts and frameworks
5. Actions<sup>8</sup>

This format will be loosely followed in the following case study. This general outline form will be combined with the framework from chapter 1 as this consultant began to look for common denominators in what seemed to be a myriad of differing viewpoints of issues and problems in NHCS. In trying to make sense of all the information gathered in the interviews, a systems approach was the lens used to assimilate the acquired information and categorize it effectively to begin to identify problem areas. The systems pyramid diagram of Anderson and Johnson from chapter 1 is repeated here. The areas of events, patterns, and structure will be used throughout the case study to categorize seemingly unrelated incidents and show that often seemingly unrelated events are actually symptoms of underlying problems.

---

7. Ellet, 48.

8. Ibid.

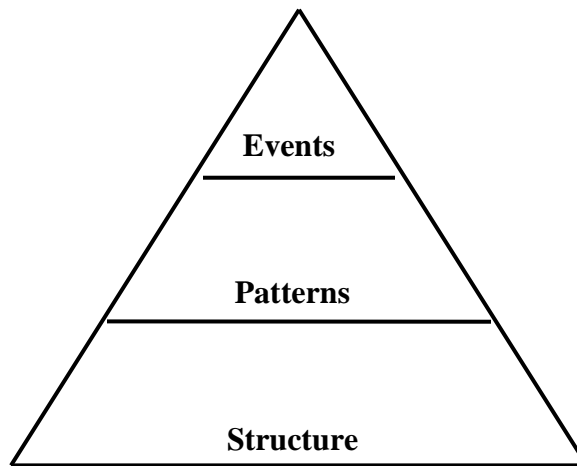


Figure 4.1 Systems Pyramid Structure<sup>9</sup>

By establishing the patterns and using the patterns to identify deeper problems, long term solutions can be discussed, and when appropriated, implemented. The case study is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the understanding the culture of the school by looking at a brief history of the church and school. The second section recounts the patterns that emerged from the interviews using a systems approach of analyzing the data from the interviews. By analyzing the information gathered from the interviews and using a systems analysis approach, this writer was able to identify some key issues and reveal some disturbing patterns, both in the organizational structure and in the culture of the school. The third section will present the recommended structural changes, and the responses of the various leadership entities (elders, school board, and administration), parents, and students to the recommendations. A case study is usually designed to provoke discussion, to create a forum for dialogue on

---

9. Anderson and Johnson, 7.

possible solutions for problems, and attempt to anticipate any and all roadblocks. It is not often that the reader is presented with actual conclusions, complete with the final chapter. However, this case study concludes with a summary of what actually happened, and the reasons for it.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Case Study: A Retrospective Analysis of New Hampshire Christian School**

#### **Introduction**

The elders of Grace Bible Church asked a consultant to help them work with NHCS, a school for which they were responsible. The elders made this request because New Hampshire Christian School was experiencing dropping admissions numbers, and remained financially dependent on the church. In order to meet the school's payroll, the church had postponed its own goals for at least 25 years. For too long the church had had to postpone its own plans in order to meet payroll for the school, and the church wanted to move forward with its own plans. The consultant is the writer of this case study and personally conducted all the interviews. The consulting report that was written at the time can be found in Appendix 1.

It is the experience of this writer that although the obvious problems are the reasons that a consultant is called in, those problems are usually only symptoms of deeper issues that need to be identified and resolved before the surface problems disappear. This writer used an interview approach in an attempt to dig beneath the surface looking for causal links to surface problems. It was the writer's belief that once deep issues were identified, the issues would cross all departmental boundaries and personal viewpoints and could be organized using systems analysis. This writer also believed that many of the issues would be found to be imbedded in the culture of the organization, and that some of the bedrock values of the school would need to be challenged. However, the writer chose

to keep an open mind and listen carefully to all those interviewed. Nearly 100 interviews were conducted. Those interviews included church leaders, school administrators, teachers, parents (including those who had withdrawn their children or had toured the school and had chosen to go elsewhere), and students (both current and former).

The terms events, patterns, and structure will be used without further definition. Those terms refer to the systems pyramid created by Anderson and Johnson as depicted earlier. Events refer to surface issues that seem to be random or isolated, but when examined as a group they no longer can be treated as isolated occurrences, but as pieces of a larger picture. The larger picture refers to patterns. Patterns reveal relationships between seemingly isolated events indicating deeper issues that are hidden from the casual observer. Structure indicates foundational issues, which are part of the fabric of the culture or organizational structure that may be inadvertently contributing to the problems affecting the viability of the organization.

### History of the Organization

A brief history of both Grace Bible Church (GBC) and New Hampshire Christian School (NHCS) is necessary in order to provide a context for subsequent events and findings. Grace Bible Church began in the late 1960s, with a movement of the Spirit in two Baptist churches in the Lakes Region of New Hampshire that left some members of both congregations unsatisfied with the structured traditionalism of the existing churches and wanting more of a Spirit led style of worship. A small group of about 20 including both of the Baptist preachers left the churches and formed their own small congregation.

There was no organized structure because of a desire not to impose boundaries on the Spirit, and the church grew. There was prolific teaching on spiritual gifts, especially the gifts strong in signs and wonders. The group was led by a few strong male leaders who assigned themselves the title of elders for life. In the early 1970s, one of the elders of the church brought the group into a shepherding/discipleship movement, which imposed a very rigid, cult-like control on the group. The makeup of the congregation changed from believers who wanted to experience God to younger, hippie-types who were looking for a meaning in life. With the change came a very separatist philosophy of Christianity.

During this time, the church also started a school for the children of its members, New Hampshire Christian School. The school operated under the same spiritual and behavioral rules as the congregation, rules that reinforced the separatist philosophy and a closed cultural system. During these founding years, the church paid 70% of the school's expenses, and there was no sense that the school needed to support itself. It was considered part of the ministry of the church, and was meant to serve the children in the congregation. Families who could not afford to send their children to NHCS were given free tuition.

By 1990, all but one of the founding elders either had resigned or had moved away from the area. This was a pivotal time in the life of GBC. Up until that point, the church had only known varying points of Arminianism, and the shackles, rules, and guilt, were overwhelming to many members of the congregation. The pastor at that time intentionally developed a systematic plan to bring Reformed Theology to the congregation. The church became less focused on signs and wonders, and moved towards understanding the gifts of the Spirit as an integral part of ministry. The church became a

church that was quietly charismatic, rather than focusing solely on signs and wonders. As the church changed its theology, it became more open, less rigid in its rules, and less controlling of its members.

The school was founded under the same controlling, legalistic theology as GBC. The church no longer was subject to the old controlling spirit, but the school was. In 2001, the pastor brought the nucleus of a new school board together in order to bring changes to the school. He convinced the elders that it was necessary to bring someone in from the outside to look at the school's financial situation and to discover the reasons for dropping enrollment. His desire was to bring a more open cultural system to NHCS.

### Identifying the Problems

The two problems that the elder board presented to this consultant were:

1. Financial – the school was not able to sustain itself and was draining the resources of the church, preventing the church from moving forward with its own plans
2. Dropping enrollment – numbers of new students applying to the school was dropping, and parents were withdrawing their students with little or no explanation

The first priority of this consultant was to ascertain whether these two problems were the real issues that needed to be addressed, or whether they were events that were indicative of deeper issues. It seemed to the consultant that interviews were the best way to hear from those involved. The interview questions began with three basic questions and then proceeded as the interviewee led the discussion. The three basic questions were:

1. What is good about the school, or in the case of parents, why do you send your children to NHCS?
2. Are there areas that frustrate you about the school?
3. What would you like to see changed?

The answer to the first question was unanimous. Parents love the school for the Christian values that were taught. They also liked the idea that the school operated as a family. For them that meant that the teachers knew their children both in and out of school. The staff would also know siblings, and would often stop to talk to them in stores, in church, and other places in the community. Students liked the school because of the many friends they had there.

The problems in the school tended to overshadow the good in the school, however. After nearly 100 interviews, the issues became clear. When the events were identified and categorized into patterns it became obvious that the two concerns that the elder board had were not the underlying issues confronting the school. They were only symptoms of deeper problems. The problems fell into four categories:

1. Physical plant
2. Leadership
3. Quality of education
4. The cultural systems



Notice that finances are not listed above. Each of these categories had multiple issues within them, and all of the problems within each of the above categories impacted the financial situation at NHCS, but it was never the primary issue. The problems in each category contributed to the financial woes of the institution, but money was never the cause of the problem. Each problem listed above will be divided into sections and individual issues will be presented and discussed.

### Physical Plant

This consultant had heard an uncorroborated story about the water park company, Six Flags. The story went along these lines. Six Flags wanted to know who the decision maker was of any group that came to the park, and why the decision was made to come. The corporate executives were shocked with the results of the survey. They expected the answers to be the children influencing the decision to come. They expected the rationale to come to be fun rides, the heat, or the company's safety record. Instead, the decision maker turned out to be the mother. Her reasons were based on the fact that the grounds were well kept, and the entrances were beautiful with lush plantings. Her rationale was that if they could get this right, then they must have paid attention to all the other details as well.

Four issues concerning the physical plant surfaced.

1. The grounds were visually unattractive, almost inhospitable
2. Maintenance was long overdue
3. The layout was disorganized and not user friendly

4. The classrooms were not meeting the needs of the teachers or the students

NHCS was in disrepair. The whole complex looked like an abandoned army depot, and looked as if no one cared about it. Nothing had been done outside to make the campus attractive, the school office was in a refurbished storage closet on the second floor and hard to find. The classrooms and furniture looked beaten up and unkempt. There were continual announcements over the public address system that distracted everyone because the hardware allowing communication between the classroom and the office was nonexistent. For someone touring the school for the first time, the initial impression was terrible; hence, there were low admissions. The consultant took a visiting friend from a third world country to see the school. His response was that, in his country, the government would not allow the school to open. It would be condemned. Clearly, this was an issue that affected the dropping enrollment.

This consultant sat down with the Director of Development. As they talked, they began to make a strategic plan for improvements and priorities assigned. Because of the timing of calling in the consultant (March) and the enrollment season for the following school year was beginning, cosmetic changes needed to be given top priority to provide the largest impact.

The first priority was given to painting classrooms and installing new carpeting where needed. A parent who owned a home decorating store was willing to make some key donations to help with this project. When the weather permitted, with the help of the church, some key landscaping was done outside including the addition of some park benches. The addition of the park benches seems insignificant, but the impact was huge.

They now gave students a place to sit and talk to each other outside; they gave teachers a place to sit and have a quiet conversation with a student when necessary; and they gave parents a landmark of where to meet their children when they picked them up from school. The park benches sent a message to everyone that the school was paying attention to them and their needs.

The second priority was given to the communication system. The school was organized around four buildings; an elementary school, a middle school, a high school, and a gymnasium. There was one phone in each building for all the communication with the school office, and only the public address was used for the office to communicate with the individual buildings. The consultant had begun the interviews immediately, had begun to hear “events,” and was developing some patterns using systems analysis. She had heard the need for better communication between the classroom and the office. She had heard parents and teachers asking for televisions in the classrooms with cable hookups, and computers in the classrooms with internet, both features allowing access for updated teaching materials. She had heard office staff asking for an easier way to find people. She had heard the development director telling of touring parents commenting that the school did not seem to be technologically current. Consequently, a plan was developed and implemented that would bring cable and internet to each classroom, and a phone in every classroom with each phone having its own intercom system, allowing for the office to page a teacher without disrupting other classrooms. Once that was installed, the feeling of chaos, and the helplessness people felt in not being able to bring order out of the seeming chaos, disappeared.

The third area addressed was the layout of the school. It was disorganized and not user friendly. By listening to many people and developing patterns out of seemingly unrelated events, the consultant and the development director were able to make some strategic changes that had long lasting ramifications.

The school office was located on the second floor of the high school building in an unused storage closet. It was hard to find and not impressive to first time visitors. The church had hopes of building its own church building (they had been using the school and the gymnasium for 25 years and were ready to move out) and had built a new driveway, complete with a cul-de-sac, behind the existing school buildings. With permission of the church elders, the consultant and the development director decided to turn two of the school buildings around by making the entrance to those buildings face the cul-de-sac. All that was needed to make this happen was to build two porticos in front of the back doors. Long term, this move would make the school and the church more of a cohesive unit. In the short term, it allowed the office to be moved down to the ground level in the middle school, right inside the main door and opposite the school library. Suddenly, it became the defining move giving the school a “front door” allowing newcomers to easily find the office and the library. The old office was upgraded and converted into a small classroom that was badly needed by the high school.

A corporate executive had donated 20 computer work stations for a computer lab. This was brought online and new software purchased that gave the school a state-of-the-art computer lab including the ability to edit sound and video.

A final physical plant project was not part of the original problem-solving strategic plan. However, because the consultant was using a systems approach, she

discovered a deep need on many fronts that one change in the physical plant would solve. She discovered that the teachers in the elementary school had no breaks, planning or otherwise, all day long. They had to cover lunch (lunch was in their classrooms as there was no cafeteria), recess, and all other activities. This practice was illegal as well as unacceptable. The high school had a large number of highly creative and artistic students and wanted to be able to provide them with art and music classes. However, they were very limited in space and were not able to incorporate those classes on an ongoing basis. The school had an excellent art teacher, but her office was in the attic of the middle school. She had to haul her art supplies up and down stairs all day long, a practice which ate into her time in the classroom with the students. The music teacher had the same problem. The development director was frustrated, because when he showed prospective students around the campus, there was nothing that made the school stand out from its competitors. Next to the office, the consultant and the development director decided to create an art/music room. This one solution solved several space problems. It also spoke to the elementary school teachers because they now had breaks in their own classrooms when their students were in art or music. The high school now had space to allow their artistic students to develop their creativity, and the development director had his showplace. Having that showplace reaped immediate results in enrollment numbers.

A plan had been developed for addressing the maintenance issues, but subsequent events prevented any of that to be addressed.

Using systems analysis in examining and categorizing the information that came from a variety of sources allowed the consultant to identify events that seemed separate but were actually contributing to many of the school's problems. By showing existing

patterns that were present and not recognized, the consultant was able to suggest possible structural changes in the physical plant that were cost effective and met the needs of significant numbers of people at the same time. Considering the amount of changes implemented, the monetary costs were minimal, especially in light of the magnitude of the impact it all had on the school family. Several donors were found who contributed labor, cash or materials to get the job done. Apart from the physical appearance of the school, the excitement that was generated amongst the families, the faculty, the staff and the congregation was immeasurable. People came from all directions wanting to get involved with the new possibilities. A group of parents even started a Saturday morning prayer meeting to pray for the school and its future.

### Leadership

The leadership issue is more complex than solving problems with the physical plant, but it had the most impact on the problems facing the school. From the interviews, the second pattern that emerged was the problematic leadership situation. Authority and power did not necessarily come together in one board or in one person. There was not a clear chain of command anywhere. Consequently, no one really knew who was in charge of any event at any given time. The pattern brought out three different aspects of leadership that needed to be identified. There were three levels of leaders involved with NHCS; the elders, the school board, and the school administration. Each level of leaders had the same issues; their view of leadership and its responsibilities, the use of power and influence, and style of decision-making. To make this easier to read, the leadership

section will be divided into three sections by issue, and each leadership group will be discussed within the section.

First, the reader needs some insight into the general situation. Education and educational standards were not important to any of the above-mentioned leaders. What mattered was the Christian values that were taught. There was little or no understanding of what the business of a school was. For all three levels of leaders, the school was the Christian education arm of the church rather than a school that was responsible for math, science, history, etc. Except for one, all of the elders had been Chairman of the school board within the past five years, and had either not been able or had not been willing to tackle the problems of the school. For all three levels of leaders, finger pointing or scapegoating was the preferred method of dealing with problems.

#### View of Leadership

The Elder board viewed leadership as the original group had when the church had first been founded. They exerted a top-down, authoritarian style of leadership and imposed their rule on all concerned. They used this style of leadership on the school board and the school as well. They gave lip-service to wanting the school to be independent, and yet, the reality was that, while they wanted the school to be independent, they retained the right to veto any decisions that anyone else made. The individuals on the elder board wanted the right to control decisions, but when they had been in positions of authority on the school board, they had not made the difficult decisions necessary to allow the school to stand on its own.

An interesting point to this consultant was the elder board's constant complaining about the finances of the school. However, while five years previously they had dropped their support for the school from \$70,000 per year to \$7,500 per year, they had never set the school free as its own 501C 3 entity that would have allowed the school to set up endowments, accept donations, or fundraise apart from the church. Many parents would have donated to the school, but the donations had to be given to the church. They did not trust the church to pass the money on to the school.

The view of the elder board was that they were the leaders, and everyone and everything connected with the school was under their thumb. They were autonomous and they were not willing to give anything up to achieve their stated goals for the school.

The school board had a different view of being on the school board. It was an honor, it gave them status in their peer groups, and they enjoyed the accolades that came with the position. However, there was no sense that they were required to identify problems and find solutions. They continually sought a scapegoat for the school's problems, but they refused to hold the principal accountable for the school's issues. Being on the school board was a reward for faithfulness to the school, not a leadership position requiring that required making difficult decisions or holding people responsible.

In the administration, the principal adopted a laissez-faire approach to leadership. His view was two-fold. If he made only a few decisions, others would step up and make them for him, and then he could not be held responsible for decisions he did not make. What was astounding to this consultant was that others did stand up and make the decisions and then assumed the responsibility for the decisions when the decision was



wrong. No one ever questioned the principal as to why he had not made the decision, and no one held him accountable for the wrong decisions.

Parents on all levels, complained to this writer about the principal. The story was always the same. If they had a problem with a teacher, or if their child had a problem with another child, they would schedule a meeting with the principal. They would talk to him, he would promise to address the issue with the appropriate person, and then they would wait. Nothing was ever done about the situation, and no one got back to the parents. There was only silence. This was completely consistent with his style of laissez-faire leadership, and he was not held accountable for it.

The second area in which the principal should have led was in the area of money. However, the person he most admired was George Muller, a man who never raised money for his orphanage in London in the 1800's. The children in his orphanage always had food and clothes when they needed them and it has been viewed as God taking care of his followers. While this writer understands the miracles of George Muller's orphanage, and believes that God does provide, she views the principal's attitude here to be another instance of him abdicating his responsibility of leadership.

#### Use of Power and Influence

The elder board had both the power and the authority. They had veto power on all decisions made by the school board and the Principal. They used this power capriciously. They would say that they wanted the school board to take charge and run the school, and yet, they threatened to veto any decision whenever they felt the need. They used their power to exert an unhealthy level of control.

The school board had the position and authority to identify problems, suggest and implement changes. Except for the threat of a veto from the elder board they were free to exert pressure for change. However, they did not. The elder board eventually appointed this consultant as chairman of the school board in order to provide the leadership necessary to affect change.

In the short term, the most problematic issues concerning the misuse of power and authority came in the school itself. When this writer spoke with a variety of people about the school the problem of authority and power became clear almost immediately.

Positional authority did not necessarily translate into power and influence. On an organization chart, the school board had a great deal of power. However, they did not use it effectively, and refused to take the responsibility for leadership. The principal also had authority, but did not make use of it. There were others in the school who filled the vacuum left when the principal abdicated his role. There were three strong women who took charge of the school: the school secretary who made most of the decisions and the principal signed his name on documents when he was told, a Bible teacher who handled most of the discipline indiscriminately and played favorites, and the head of the elementary school who was also the wife of the principal. Not long after the consultant was hired the Bible teacher was fired, not for her inappropriate use of power but for her heretical Bible teachings. When the interviews began the school secretary resigned. The consultant suspected it was because the secretary was worried about what the consultant would find. This was later indirectly confirmed. However, the consultant found no wrong doing on the part of the secretary. In fact, things got worse after she left. That left only the head of the elementary school. She will be called Mary.

Mary was a very strong personality and her husband did as he was told. She influenced all aspects of the school, because she had such a strong influence on her husband. What was most distressing was that the elementary school teachers and the parents of elementary school students had no voice. If they had a complaint, especially about Mary, the only person to whom they could go was Mary's husband. The elders and the school board were also afraid of her. People on both boards and some parents asked the consultant to do something about Mary. It took some time but Mary was finally convinced to retire.

It is not a foregone conclusion that whoever has the position or the authority on paper, actually has the influence to make things happen. Often people are given the responsibility to make things happen, but are not given the power or authority to actually make those things occur. This was common at NHCS, making decision making extremely difficult. The elder board gave the school board the responsibility of leading the school, and yet, reserved the right to veto anything the school board tried to do. The principal was given the responsibility of running the school and yet, a group of women constantly worked behind his back making decisions without consulting him. The only administrator who effectively did his job was the Development Director. When people needed something done, done well and on time, they went to him. He did not abuse his position or his authority, and yet, he got things done. He was the glue that kept the school together.

## Decision Making

In the elder board, the process of decision-making was through discussion and then a vote on the issue. That would seem straight forward except for one problem. There was a clause in the bylaws of the church that was still there from the time that the original leaders were desirous of being open to the leading of the Spirit. The clause stated that unless there was unanimous agreement within the elder board on an issue, no action would be taken. Initially, the intent of the clause was to let the Holy Spirit lead the church and its leaders. However, within the elder board there were individuals who wanted to exert individual control over the entire organization, and they began to use this clause to promote their own agenda. Most of the elders were pleasant men but not strong leaders. They did not have the courage, strength or the mental determination to withstand someone, someone they considered a friend, who was determined to assume full power. The consequences of this weakness had long term ramifications and will be discussed later.

Decision-making on the school board was also done through discussion and then a vote. Often, however, the discussion was long and protracted. Various members of the school board did not want to make decisions that might affect their popularity amongst their friends or would impact the principal or his wife. There was a great deal of bickering, finger-pointing, and obstinacy, making it very difficult for them to reach any sort of consensus. One school board member who was not happy with some of the changes being made in the school and on the school board contributed very little during the meetings. He would quietly go to the elders and express his displeasure of current

events and would try to stir up trouble. Often he would succeed, making any decision-making even more difficult.

As time went on, the qualifications for school board member were revised, and more qualified people were invited onto the board. It eventually became a qualified, responsible board, not only able to wrestle with current problems, but to also plan for the future.

Decision-making was very difficult for the principal. He preferred not to have to take responsibility for his decisions. When his secretary resigned and the Bible teacher was let go he had a very difficult time. He relied more and more on the development director for wise counsel, always subject, of course, to the counsel of his wife. This forced the school board, especially this writer, to make more decisions concerning the daily running of the school. When this writer forced the decisions back onto the principal, the school seemed to have no one in charge. Times were difficult. When the consultant suggested that a new principal be found, the school board shied away from the decision and infighting began in the elder board over the issue. No one liked or approved of the job performance of the principal, but neither board was willing to make the difficult decision to replace him. They abdicated making one of the tough decisions that leadership boards are required to make.

Leadership can make or break any organization. With good leadership a mediocre organization can do well, and with poor leadership an excellent company can fold. The performance of the leadership teams at NHCS and at GBC was poor, which was a key reason why the school was having difficulty.

## Quality of Education

Quality of education was not a primary concern of either the elder board or the school board. It was of secondary importance to the principal. However, it was the most important thing for parents and many of the teachers. Students were not being accepted into good colleges. The SAT scores were too low. There was very little tracking of the subjects each student took. Unless parents were very involved and watched the course selection of their child closely, a child could graduate missing whole fields of study. One girl was ready to graduate when it was discovered that she had taken the same math class three times and had passed every time. She wanted to go to college, and yet, she had not taken algebra or geometry, only three years of consumer math.

Interviewing the teachers was actually fun for this writer. As a group, they were a joy to be around, committed to their jobs and their students, and very good at teaching. This writer was very impressed with the quality of the teachers and with their knowledge of their subject matter. This writer often wondered why the teachers stayed, in what seemed to be such a dysfunctional environment. They were more than qualified to teach in a more financially rewarding organization. Though they were all frustrated with the leadership and the general lack of organization, they stayed because they were strongly committed to teaching in a Christian environment and to their students. They were less committed to the principal and did not respect him, but he let them do as they pleased and left them alone, so they tolerated him.

Some of the middle and upper school teachers had voiced a concern that the students were coming into their classrooms with inconsistent knowledge backgrounds. As

teachers in the elementary school shifted around or were replaced, the curriculum in that particular grade changed. This writer asked about a “scope and sequence,” a master plan for the entire school determining goals for each grade to ensure that the teacher for the following year knew where to begin teaching, but none had been written. When this writer asked the principal why one had not been created, his reply was that it took too much work to write one.

Most of the high school parents complained about the low academic standards. The Principal’s hiring practices frustrated the teachers. If an interviewee told Sam that God had directed him or her to apply for a teaching position at NHCS, Sam would hire him or her, regardless of educational background or expertise. The teachers, who were qualified and excellent teachers, were frustrated at being grouped together with unqualified, uneducated teachers. The history teacher had never gone to college, had never studied history, and taught the class by reading one chapter ahead in the book. When the students laughed at him or ignored him, he swore at the classes and eventually had to be dismissed.

The teachers expressed some common frustrations. Money for classroom supplies was a problem. Many of the parents realized that there were financial problems in the school, and personally bought classroom materials for their children’s classrooms. Consequently, some classrooms were better equipped than others, which only made the deficiencies more glaring.

Nearly all of the high school teachers complained about the poor teaching materials and textbooks. However, some were able to work around the problems. The resourceful science teacher asked if her advanced class could meet in the computer lab

rather than the science lab because then they could do virtual dissections on the internet. The science lab had only two microscopes and no money for frogs to dissect. On the other side of the spectrum, the English teacher had outside reading for her students. Those books were not classics, as one would expect, but were poorly written Christian fiction. Students had problems with college boards because they did not know the literature. The consultant found that the quality of education was the top reason why parents pulled their students out of the school. Since this was not an important issue for the governing boards, they could not understand the driving force behind the withdrawals. One school board member told this writer that she had no patience with parents who removed their children from the school due to low educational standards. She viewed those parents as too demanding, and felt that the school was better off without those children. When the consultant asked why the parents left their child in the school, the response was either that the public school was worse, or that the child's friends were at the school.

For parents, education was the school's primary business and the Christian values being taught were a bonus. For the governing boards and the principal the Christian values taught were the business of the school, and the subjects such as math, science, and history were a bonus. The parents and the administration seemed to be talking at cross-purposes, and this was the reason. They had a different set of priorities. The school could not adequately identify what business it was in. Consequently, it did nothing well.



## The Cultural Systems

This consultant wondered if there were cultural issues that were contributing to the difficulties. There were some serious problems in the high school. In talking with high school teachers and high school students, some very troublesome patterns began to emerge.

A deep sense of frustration for the teachers and the administration was the behavior of the high school students. Many of the students exhibited an undercurrent of anger, rebellion, and often defiance. No one could pinpoint exactly why this was, especially since most of the parents said that this attitude or behavior was not present when the child was at home. The attitude existed in both boys and girls. It just looked different. For both sexes, it showed in the blatant disregard for the dress code, causing many petty detentions for students. For the boys, it showed up in extremely rough horseplay, sometimes bordering on assault, and in the music volume on the car radio in the parking lot. For the girls, it showed up in petulance, whining, insolence, and in mocking of authority. None of the above behaviors should have been unexpected in teenagers, but the intensity and the deliberateness behind the actions made this writer realize that this was more than general teen behavior. It was an indication that something else was happening. What the faculty did not know was that this defiance was also playing out in the community with heavy drinking, promiscuity, and drugs.

It was by listening to the students that the consultant began to understand the underlying problems for the students. The school was operating as a closed system (see page 20). Many of the attitudes of the original founding church leaders were still being

enforced. The rules were suffocating the students. When this writer reviewed the rules, most of them did not seem to be inappropriate. There were a few that were highly controlling, such as the rule that students were only allowed to listen to Christian music. This rule was reflective of the separatist mindset of the original founding fathers of both the church and the school. Since this writer never listens to Christian music outside of church she thought this rule excessive, and she could not see how the school was able to enforce it, but the administration tried. What she did find, however, was that the problems arose when she looked at how the rules were being enforced.

By talking to the students, primarily middle and high school students, this writer was able to discover the rules. From the student's perspective, the cultural rules (some written, some hidden) were as follows.

1. You must respect your elders, but do not expect to be respected in return.
2. You must do as you are told, whether or not it makes sense, and do not expect to be given any rationale. Asking "why" is considered insubordination.
3. We will tell you who you can be and what you can do, whether or not it fits your skills and talents.
4. If something is not labeled "Christian," it is sinful. It does not matter if the quality is poor or it is not a Christian issue, it is still sin. Even the facts of history are not taught if they do not enhance Christianity.
5. You are not allowed to ask questions about Christianity, or allowed to know or learn about other religions or schools of thought in order to understand the world around you.
6. You are not a Christian if you smoke or drink.

7. You must dress as if you are 30 rather than 15.
8. The school makes every effort to control my life outside of school as well as in school. I can get expelled for something I do on Saturday night, even if it is not wrong.

From the students' perspective, there was no freedom to be who they were, little freedom to express who they were, and few outlets for growth in areas in which they desired to grow. What the writer discovered in talking with students was there was a large segment of the high school population that was highly creative in art, music, video and audio production, and in creative writing. The art teacher was excellent, and was working with and encouraging these talented students in very meaningful ways. Music was a different story. The principal was the choral director. He was gifted in music, but his love was old hymns sung *a cappella*. This was not what students wanted to sing, and they were frustrated. They were not expecting acid rock or rap music, but they wanted something more contemporary than old hymns. They also wanted some music theory with an eye on composing. There was a teacher who could teach it, but it was never implemented in any meaningful way. In terms of video and audio production, the school had the equipment, a keyboard designed to record new compositions, complete with music editing software, and video and audio editing software to teach video and audio production. However, the principal did not value the field (or any technology), and it never happened. There was no teacher who was qualified enough to teach creative writing, and the school did not look for someone to augment the faculty. The argument could be made that money was the issue, but it was not. Several parents, who were well qualified to teach creative writing, would have volunteered willingly to teach the above subjects, but they were never asked.

If the writer were to paint a picture of the student's situation, it would be of the students being compressed in a vise, and as the vise got tighter and tighter, everything inside these students oozed out in all directions. It played out in the defiance of the dress code, an "in your face" attitude about the music they chose, and hostility for others (mostly for those in authority), lay just beneath the surface.

From the students' perspective, they were living in a tightly closed system, and they were frustrated. The students who were happiest were those who resigned themselves to the system and found fulfillment outside of school. The ones who were the unhappiest were those who wanted the school to broaden their horizons, wanted real substance in education, and wanted to be heard and valued. Some, of course, acted out because they simply were bored.

Some of the high school teachers were out of touch with where their students were coming from. The issues were not too different than other schools in that it was modern teachers teaching to postmodern students. This writer did some research on postmodernism in an effort to help the school board, high school teachers, and the administration understand some of the students' frustrations. There was a great deal of discussion, but there was no significant change in the approach (see Appendix 2).

As is typical of a closed system, discipline for infractions was severe. There was no sense of grace given or that attempting redemption was important to the administration. All discipline was punitive. What was also demoralizing to students was that it was not unusual to be guilty by association, punished and never forgiven. For example, in talking with a student, I will call her Carol, this writer heard that when Carol had been a freshman, she was asked to be in the student leadership group. During the

year, she had been invited by some friends to a party. When she got there, a few of the people were smoking and had a few beers. She did not smoke, nor did she drink anything other than Coke. Because she had been at the party, and the administration heard of her attendance, Carol had been told she had to leave the leadership group, and was basically shunned throughout the rest of her time at NHCS. She had been judged by association only. When this writer met Carol, the writer assumed that Carol was one of the leaders of the student body. She was one of the most influential girls in the high school, a star volleyball player and academically near the top of the class. She was far more of a natural leader than many who had followed the rules, and were asked to stay in the leadership group. The school's culture had kept Carol from developing her natural talents as a leader and had actually driven her towards the very culture that the school abhorred.

What interested this consultant was how some of the things she did were very meaningful to the students. The first was obviously just sitting down and talking to them, and carefully listening to what they had to say. The other things that impressed them were done in the initial physical plant improvements.

The second item that made an impact was the landscaping, particularly the park benches. The students had longed for a place to be able to sit and talk with their friends and now they had several places. They felt heard. They felt understood, and that their needs mattered. This writer was amazed at how those park benches impacted so many people in so many ways.

The third change that deeply impacted the high school students was the art room. Many of the students felt heard and taken seriously when the art room was built. Students began winning state awards in water colors, oil painting and photography. The words of

deep thanks from students indicated to this writer how deeply the students had felt unappreciated or perhaps unknown.

The fourth item that was done was the completion of the computer lab. This consultant had also realized that while there were several courses that female students enjoyed, there was nothing special for boys that would keep them interested. A programming teacher was found who began teaching programming. One parent confided to the writer that it was the programming class that had kept his son out of trouble for the entire school year. Several of those boys have gone into web page design, or are software engineers today. Those boys felt understood and valued.

The original closed system of the school was stifling these students. It was the system itself that was driving some students to act out, both in school and in the community. It was when the system began to open up that the students began to relax and behave. The rules did not change, but the way they were enforced did. It was when the students began to feel respected and valued as individuals that most of the problems disappeared. It was when this writer sat down with the senior class and talked to them about God's plan for marriage and why He wants his people to remain chaste until after marriage and done without condemning them that they understood and stopped. They felt that they had been given real answers in an honest way without being judged.

### The Results

As all the changes were being made, parents and students were getting excited about NHCS. For the first time they were proud to be a part of the school and were

anticipating what would come next. The number of requests for tours and applications was up, the school board had become the leadership board it needed to be, and plans were being discussed for an addition onto the elementary school. Everything that the elder board had envisioned was beginning to happen.

Sometimes insignificant things can actually be far more important than they seemed originally. The problems arose within the elder board of the church. Remember, the original elders were elders for life. Remember the clause that said that everyone had to agree or no decision would be made. One of the elders from the past, a very rules oriented authoritarian style leader asked to be reinstated as an elder. I will call him Sandy. Unbeknownst to anyone, Sandy wanted reinstatement to the elder board because he wanted control of NHCS. Here was a man who understood power, how to get it and how to use it, and he was ruthless.

Sandy's job had taken him to Pennsylvania, and just recently, he had been transferred back to New Hampshire. Both the church and the school had changed tremendously since his departure, and Sandy was very unhappy with the changes. The church was theologically and culturally a more open system than Sandy thought proper, and Sandy was concerned because the pastor and his consultant were attempting to bring that same open system to NHCS. Unbeknownst to anyone, Sandy decided to take the church and the school back to the former closed system. It should be noted that Sandy was not only a former elder, but he was also the founding principal of NHCS. He talked to one of his old friends, and used him to bring pressure on the existing board to allow him to be allowed back on the elder board again.

As previously mentioned, the bylaws of GBC included a clause that stated that all decisions of the elders must be unanimous. The policy had been that if no agreement could be reached, no decision would be rendered. Usually, it meant that the existing policy would stand, but Sandy forced the issue, making the “no decision” vote become a vote to suspend any action until agreement could be reached. Sandy began a silent campaign to take control of the elder board, to turn the board against the pastor, and to destroy the credibility of the consultant. When he became an elder, he began to manipulate the elder board, using the above clause, to stop all forward movement of the church. He refused to agree with minor decisions. He was obstinate about holding up decisions affecting the school. In many ways, he held the elder board hostage on church issues to get his own way at NHCS.

All efforts by the elders to stop Sandy were fruitless. The bylaws also stipulated that all subjects discussed in the elders must be held confidential, and the elders honored that stipulation, so Sandy’s manipulations were done in secrecy. The congregation had no idea what was happening. He had seized the power before the other elders realized what he was doing.

Power is a very important tool when bringing about change, and it should never be underestimated. The Elders had made this writer Chairman of the school board in an effort to give her enough power to bring about the necessary changes. However, they did not expect the enemy of change to be in the elders’ own camp. The consultant recognized what Sandy was trying to do, but was powerless to stop it. The other elders did not have the strength of personality or character to do it. Before Sandy was reinstated to the elder board, the elder board had all the power. After he was reinstated, he took nearly all the



power, and left the elder board with very little. He ultimately manipulated the pastor into resigning and forced the termination of the consultant.

The final result was a church split. Seventy percent of the congregation left with the pastor, and the school was left with very few students. The school board was disbanded, most of the teachers fired, and families were threatened with insubordination when they confronted Sandy. The consultant was threatened with a restraining order if she set foot on school property or spoke with parents and students.

The ultimate fight was in the elder board, not the school board or in the school. The initial intended changes came to fruition. The school board became the board it should have been. Educational standards began to rise and the closed culture of the school was opening up in a very healthy way, just the way the elder board had envisioned.

However, the healthy, open system was not what the original founding leaders wanted. They believed they were fighting to preserve the system they had founded many years ago. The fighters were few, perhaps as few as five or six, as opposed to more than 100 people who wanted the more open system, but the fighters had maneuvered themselves into positions of power and authority to force the boundaries closed once more. Consequently, the church now has very few congregants and the school has very few students. The church has no pastor because Sandy wants all the money to go to the school for maintenance and salaries.

The elder board of GBC no longer understands what its business is. It should be a church, not a school. Just as the prior elder boards would not let the school be a school, now the elder board will not let the church be a church. There are no families in the

church, and no children from its congregation attend the school. The culture of the church is once again one of rigid authoritarian control, separate from the world around it and exerting very little influence for Christ in the surrounding region. The school has lost most of its students and is surviving because of the church funds. Sandy exerts tight control over both the church and the school. Under Sandy's closed system approach, the school is barely surviving, cannot pay its bills, and is completely dependent on a dying church for its existence.

By using systems analysis at NHCS, this writer was able to gain an understanding of the dynamics of both the school and the overseeing church. While she was not in a position to change the cultural system of the overseeing church, she was able to identify problem areas within the school and take measures to improve the system. By uncovering the closed system of the school's culture and how it impacted students, she was able to bring about a more open system that was beneficial to students as well as to parents and teachers. When the system was closed, few people volunteered and students were unhappy. As the system opened up, parents got excited, wanted to start a parents' organization, and wanted to get involved in the life of the school. Students began to feel good about themselves, and to grow in their faith.

Opening up the system had a profound effect on all involved. Once the feeling of a measure of freedom became widespread, few people were willing to return to the closed system. When the elders fired the school board and attempted to return the school to the closed system, parents were very unhappy and students did not return the following year. Most of the teachers were fired. The school lost its accreditation and educational levels have fallen even farther.

The elders voted to return the church to the former closed system as well. They fired Paul, and, consequently, have lost nearly the entire congregation. The church has not hired a new pastor, using all its financial resources to support the school. Following the rules, top down authoritarian leadership, and mandated behavior is the cultural system of Grace Bible Church today. There are very few members. The families left with Paul and there are no new people coming to join. The open system that Paul had established at GBC has transformed itself into a new church, Lakeport Gospel Chapel. At Lakeport, the leadership is having trouble finding cribs for the newborns, Sunday school rooms for the young children and seats for the new families that arrive every week. Leaders are being developed, people are growing in their faith, volunteers abound, and the members are excited about the future. Individuals are valued and their unique skills and talents are being utilized and incorporated into the church. When Paul and this writer had first sat down and discussed the changes at GBC that had transpired since he had taken the church from its former self to what existed when the consultant was hired, his comment was that they were no longer a New Testament church. Lakeport Gospel Church is truly a New Testament church. It is neighbor helping neighbor, mature believers growing young believers, excitement about growing in faith. The contrast between the closed system of GBC and the open system of LGC is striking. Open systems foster growth and a hope in the future. Closed systems promote hopelessness, defiance, and rebellion. In Christian settings, this leads to rejection of the church, and may ultimately lead to a rejection of God.

Open systems are what God wants for the church and are part of God's plan for all of us. It allows everyone to grow and develop as God intended us to do. Psalm

139:13-14 says that we are all created specifically to be who we are with a specific set of skills and talents. “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” As leaders of Christian organizations, it incumbent upon us to provide a place that recognizes that each person has a place, each person have value, and each can contribute to the well-being of the whole. Providing an open system within the organization allows personal growth and development and an opportunity to mature in faith.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

The following is a fable by the Persian poet Jalāl al-Din Rūmī (d 1273). It is entitled “Three Blind Men and an Elephant.” It is a classic tale, which graphically demonstrates the problems that ensue when you only look at the parts instead of viewing the whole as the sum of the parts.

One day, three blind men happened to meet each other and gossiped a long time about many things. Suddenly one of them recalled, “I heard that an elephant is a queer animal. Too bad we’re blind and can’t see it.” “Ah, yes, truly too bad we don’t have the good fortune to see the strange animal,” another one sighed. The third one, quite annoyed, joined in and said, “See? Forget it! Just to feel it would be great.” “Well, that’s true. If only there were some way of touching the elephant, we’d be able to know,” they all agreed.

It so happened that a merchant, with a herd of elephants, was passing, and overheard their conversation. “You fellows, do you really want to feel an elephant? Then follow me; I will show you,” he said. The three men were surprised and happy. Taking one another’s hand, they quickly formed a line and followed while the merchant led the way. Each one began to contemplate how he would feel the animal, and tried to figure how he would form an image. After reaching their destination, the merchant asked them to sit on the ground to wait. In a few minutes, he led the first blind man to feel the elephant. With outstretched hand, he touched first the left foreleg and then the right. After that, he felt the two legs from the top to the bottom, and with a beaming face, turned to say, “So, the queer animal is just like that.” Then he slowly returned to the group. Thereupon the second blind man was led to the rear of the elephant. He touched the tail, which wagged a few times, and he exclaimed with satisfaction, “Ha! Truly a queer animal! Truly odd! I know now. I know.” He hurriedly stepped aside.

The third blind man’s turn came, and he touched the elephant’s trunk, which moved back and forth turning and twisting and he thought, “That’s it! I’ve learned.”

The three blind men thanked the merchant and went their way. Each one was secretly excited over the experience and had a lot to say, yet all walked rapidly without saying a word.

“Let’s sit down and have a discussion about this queer animal,” the second blind man said, breaking the silence. “A very good idea. Very good.” the other two agreed for they also had this in mind. Without waiting for anyone to be properly seated, the second one blurted out, “This queer animal is like our straw fans swinging back and forth to give us a breeze. However, it’s not so big or well made. The main portion is rather wispy.” “No, no!” the first blind man shouted in disagreement. “This queer animal resembles two big trees without any branches.” “You’re both wrong,” the third man replied. “This queer animal is similar to a snake; it’s long and round, and very strong.”

How they argued! Each one insisted that he alone was correct. Of course, there was no conclusion for not one had thoroughly examined the whole elephant. How can anyone describe the whole until he has learned the total of the parts.

By looking at only specific parts of the elephant and not seeing all of the parts or how the parts work together, the blind men missed the elephant altogether. When all problem solving in families or organizations focuses on only individual parts, the larger problem gets ignored. Systems thinking is the opposite. If the blind men had examined all of the parts or had acknowledge that each one had only “seen” parts of the elephant and then tried to put the parts together into one large picture, the real elephant would have started to appear. As it was, they clung to the part they had touched as if it were the whole, and consequently, missed the elephant altogether. Systems analysis gives the researcher the opportunity to take a step back and see the larger picture, and then examine whether or not the existing system fulfills the original plan.

In this project, systems thinking has been defined both from an organizational perspective and in family therapy. Each perspective has its purpose, and together they are invaluable in understanding groups that choose to operate as families rather than a seemingly impersonal corporation. The family therapy system approach is also very helpful in understanding corporate culture as well. Systems analysis enables analysts to

view relationships between parts of the whole, and to assess the viability of those relationships. In organizations, it allows the researcher to assess how those relationships help or hurt the organization as a whole, and to reveal discrepancies when the parts are not moving forward together in harmony. In families, systems analysis allows the therapist to understand the family culture as a whole, rather than focusing on the one person who seems to be the problem.

In moving forward the lessons learned are interesting. Leadership is a key factor in making an organization healthy; understanding leadership for what it is, being willing to make the difficult decisions that come with leading, and identifying the particular sets of responsibilities that are part of the leadership role where one is at the time. A comprehensive leadership training program would seem to be crucial to any organization that desires competent leadership at every level.

It is very important that the right leaders are in place in the proper positions for the organization to be healthy. This begins with the leader knowing his or her own strengths and weaknesses, especially if a team approach to leading is sought and a consulting style of leadership is intended. When this writer began to assemble a school board that would function as an actively involved board, she looked at the strengths and weaknesses of all the long term board members and began to look for specific skill mixes in people that were needed on the board. Eventually, the school board had a complete skill mix with several leaders who had the expertise to lead in a variety of areas. While the ultimate decision would sometimes come down to one person making a decision, it was a comfort to have confidence in the expertise of other leaders who knew the issues and were free to give competent input to any decision.

Another important lesson learned from this case study is how important it is to fully understand the business in which the organization operates. While a church and a school may share the same Christian values, they are not in the same business. The business of a school is to educate, and the church is grow disciples for Christ. While the school may also be committed to growing disciples for Christ, it is not their primary business. Understanding this concept helps leaders in setting priorities in their decisions, and keeping their organization focused. Often good ideas are very good ideas, but are not necessarily good for the organization at the time they are being considered.

A third important lesson was recognizing how deeply people need to feel heard and understood by the leadership. Often leaders feel that to make people feel heard and understood requires large programs, gifts, etc., that can cost the company a great deal of money. This may not be the case, as was seen in something as simple as park benches for people to sit on outside in good weather, or the art room the met several needs on a variety of levels at NHCS.

The brother of this consultant was CEO of a company in Wisconsin in the early 1990's. As CEO, he made three changes to his plant, which bought amazing loyalty from his line workers. First, he upgraded the cafeteria and break room, making them real places for employees to take a much-needed break from the assembly line. Secondly, he organized the assembly line into teams with each team having the ability to organize how they would organize the assembly at their station, and incentives were in place for each team to continually become more efficient. The third program instituted was the ability for all employees to be able to buy home computer systems at a discount and finance them through the company at a low rate of interest. Nearly 90% of the employees took



advantage of this program because it benefitted their families as well as giving the employee a way to become more computer literate and enhancing their job performance with increased chances for advancement. The employees felt valued and appreciated at very little cost to the company.

The greatest lesson learned in the experience of consulting with NHCS was the difficulty of bringing change in an embedded culture, especially one as entrenched as Grace Bible Church. Often, time is an issue. People need time to become accustomed to new ideas or a new direction. In this instance, time was not available as the school was ready to close if something tangible was not done immediately. However, as was seen, it is not always individual attitudes that prevent change.

It can come from old incorporation documents that have clauses affecting governance, theology or values that affect the ability to bring about change. The driver behind this need for change was the pastor of Grace Bible Church. From what was learned from this experience, while this consultant was not asked to suggest any changes to GBC, in the future she might ask the “driver” or in this case the pastor, to review bylaws or foundational documents for possible roadblocks to change. The success of Lakeport Gospel Chapel indicates how much the church needed to get out from under the authority of the old bylaws and the old closed system.

For this consultant, the most important result of this project was developing a vocabulary for information she knew intuitively. It has been a validating experience, and has given her a language to use in future consulting projects. Seeing the Bible through the lens of systems analysis has added new depth to her faith and new insight into Bible teaching.

## **Appendix 1**

# **Consulting Report**

**New Hampshire Christian School**

**2001**



### Qualifications of the following report

The following report was written by this writer after conducting nearly 100 interviews. It was submitted to the elders and school board of New Hampshire Christian School in August of 2002. Since Grace Bible Church, New Hampshire Christian School, and the names of the individuals discussed in the case study have been changed, the names in the report have been changed to match the previous case study. The report itself has not been altered.

The introduction has been written in a form that was designed to be heard by a very strong, charismatic audience. Without that language, many who were to read this report would not have listened to this writer. It has not been changed to meet the requirements of this project. Except for actual name changes, the report has not been modified.

August 2001

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Chapter</b>	
<b>1. Introduction</b>	120
<b>2. History of School</b>	122
<b>3. Environmental Profiles</b>	123
Community Profile	
School Profile	
Physical Plant	
<b>4. Position Statements</b>	128
Mission	
Core Values	
Vision	
<b>5. Administration</b>	131
Analysis	
Organizational Structure	
<b>6. Financial Report</b>	134
Finances	
Development	
A Development Structure	
<b>7. School Life</b>	141
Academics	
Home School	
Athletics	
<b>8. Spiritual Input</b>	146
<b>9. Board of Directors</b>	148
Purpose/function of board	
Qualifications of new members	
<b>10. Recommendations</b>	151

## Introduction

In compiling this report I have spoken at length with parents, teachers, administrators, church elders, alumni, former students, and Christian businessmen (some who know the school and some who don't). I have also made various observations, made conclusions based on observations and discussions and then have attempted to validate my conclusions before writing this report. I do not pretend to have all the information available. However, I have made a serious attempt to gather as much information as possible.

When I was asked to be on the board of New Hampshire Christian School I prayed long and hard before taking the position. I accepted the position because I believe beyond any doubt that the Lord gave me as strong a mandate as I have ever had that I must accept the position. When Paul, with the backing of the elders of Grace Bible Church, asked me to assume the chair of the board, he was deeply concerned that the school was in serious crisis and, if things were not changed, the school would have to close its doors at the end of the 2002-2003 school year. After reviewing the financial books, evaluating academic standards, and reviewing the vision and goals of the school I concur with his assessment. Major changes must take place to insure its survival. Many of the changes will not be popular. The decisions will be difficult but are necessary. I have tried to be as honest as I can in compiling this report. Some people will feel that I am being too harsh or that in exposing some of the issues I am attacking certain individuals. This is not the intention of the report, or my own personal desire, but if I am to carry out the task that I have been given, weaknesses must be faced and strengthened whether or not it is easy. If the decision makers refuse to solve the problems and make the difficult decisions the school will fail, donor's money will have been wasted and the school will close.

I have spent a great deal of time in prayer. One day I prayed for a visual image that would allow me to convey to others what I was seeing. I saw a freight train stationary on a siding in a train yard. It had neither engine nor an engineer. It was stopped. The cars were old and in disrepair. Inside the train cars, there was great activity – people running around maintaining the inside of the cars but no one looked out to notice that the train wasn't moving, not going anywhere. I felt that God was telling me that it is my task to make the decision makers aware of the need for change – the need to find an engine and an engineer, to examine the freight cars and decide which ones to keep and which to reject, to evaluate which can be fixed and which are beyond repair. The task includes getting the train back on the track, finding a train crew to drive the train, assisting the crew to point a direction and to get the train moving forward again. In accomplishing this task, it is also necessary to build a strong train that will be able to withstand the journey.

In evaluating the school as a whole, I feel that it is important to decide what is necessary to keep as is and what is necessary to change. Attitudes must change, some personnel must be replaced, standards must rise, and the board must decide how it is to relate to the school. Some of these things are already beginning to happen, but progress must not stop. One of the most difficult things to change will be the attitudes

of leaders who are directly responsible for the operations of the school. Priorities must be revised if not completely changed. Public perception of the school is not good. The majority of alumni do not seem to be behind the school and do not contribute financially to its well-being. Change will be an uphill battle and the outcome is questionable. I see no other way to accomplish the task other than by micromanaging affairs at the beginning. I sincerely hope I will be able to step back as others step up to assume some of the responsibilities.

Money is certainly an issue, but it is not the only issue, and in my mind not the most serious one. The most serious issue to me is the way the school views itself. It continues to live in the past. It remains the same school it was in the 1970's. The world has changed dramatically since then – in some ways positively and in some ways negatively, but New Hampshire Christian School has not met the challenge of equipping students to stand tall in the world in which they must live, academically, vocationally or spiritually. Quality of education is a distant second to what is perceived as spiritual maturity. However, I do not perceive a spiritual maturity on the part of the students, some yes but not necessarily the majority, and alumni behavior seems to confirm that perception. Too many alumni within 5 years of graduation do not walk with the Lord - too many unwed mothers, too many alumni who are shipwrecked both morally and spiritually if they have graduated from a Christian school that prides itself in its spiritual influence on the lives of its students. The spiritual climate needs to be examined closely and changes implemented. The school also sees itself as poor, having to make do with poor textbooks and equipment, and for some that poverty and poor facilities are what Christian schools should be. This theology is not scriptural but quite common in some circles. This attitude is preventing God from moving in great ways with the school.

Because I am the chairman of the board of directors as well as the consultant writing this report changes will start to happen even before the report is concluded. I expect to start changes to the physical plant as soon as possible – some have already begun. I will then start to address changes in priorities and attitudes in the leadership ranks and start to raise academic standards by examining textbooks in the weakest areas, especially in the history department.

The following report is not meant to present a 5-year strategic plan, only to highlight the school as it is today and to highlight areas of concern that need to be closely examined if the school is to survive. The strategic plan and future vision of the school will be addressed in another report.

## **History of New Hampshire Christian School**

New Hampshire Christian School began as Christian Fellowship School with Grant as the founder and principal in the fall of 1974 and opened in the “Light House,” a large old farmhouse/ beauty salon on Court Street in Grace. Christian Fellowship School received its program approval from the State of New Hampshire in December 1975 when it had 52 students. Its first senior student, Mark, graduated in the spring of 1977.

After searching and investigating over 60 properties and facilities over a two year period the focus of the school building committee came down to the present property on Mountain View Center Road on the Lakeville town border with Mountain View. The first price given for the property was \$ 30,000 for 20 acres but was increased to 40 acres for the same price when the owner realized it was for a school. The Elders and other leaders of Grace Bible Church Fellowship met among the trees on the property to pray and seek God’s will regarding the possibility of this property for the school. As a result of a time of worship and prayer, they unanimously felt led to offer \$ 35,000 for the full 140 acres and offer a tax-deductible receipt for the balance of value of the property. In our subsequent meeting with the owner and his accountant, the owner said, “I have given to the Lord before and I want to do it again.” God was faithful to touch the owner’s heart in answer to our prayer and His direction.

A local well driller heard of the new school project and donated a well for the school even though it took drilling three wells to find sufficient water. Another benefactor brought his bulldozer, made an entrance road, and cleared the property. Through volunteer labor, sacrificial contractors, multiple gifts and benefactors, a \$100,000 loan signed by the Elders and sacrificial giving by the members Grace Bible Church Fellowship and other churches, the construction began and the current Middle School building was completed in six weeks (Sept 1 to Oct 9, 1978) and classes began. The second building (current elementary building) was started immediately and built through the winter allowing the balance of the school to move in the spring of 1979. The current High School building was completed a year and a half later to be followed in 1983 by the construction of the Gymnasium. An addition to the gymnasium that included baths, a small conference room and rooms for the NILD program were completed five years ago.

Volunteer labor has been the backbone of the school throughout its history and continues to be today.

## Community Profile

Belknap County is located in the Lakes Region of New Hampshire on the shores of Lake Winnepesaukee, Lake Winnisquam and other smaller lakes. It is part of a larger resort area of NH and has a great deal of seasonal work.

There are 11 towns in Belknap County – Alton, Barnstead, Belmont, Center Harbor, Gilford, Gilmanton, Lakeville, Mountain View, New Hampton, Sanbornton, and Tilton. It covers a land mass of 401 square miles. The population in the area is approximately 57,000 people, 24% of these people are under the age of 18. The median income for the region is approximately \$39,000.

The general educational level of this region of NH is quite high. More than 80% are high school graduates and more than 50% have some level of college education – more than 20% have a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Lakeville is the business center of the region having a manufacturing sector, predominantly in metals. The World War II generation has had a significant number renovate their summer homes into year-round homes and retired to this region for their 'golden years.' Consequently, healthcare is big business in the Lakes Region. Medical professions such as doctors, nurses, LPN's, elder care, and hospice are all 'big businesses in this area. Even such support fields such as general care like driving elderly, opening and closing homes for those who travel to the south during the cold months, etc. provide employment.

There is a large sector of the economy, which is comprised of small businesses, and 18% of all small businesses in this area are owned and run by women. Trades such as plumbers, carpenters, electricians thrive. Because of the vibrant economy of the area, there are many opportunities for white-collar workers in management of local companies, lawyers, accountants, doctors, administrators. There is a strong presence of small computer companies, graphic designers, network professionals and other computer related industries. Retail sales have a large impact within the economic community and even some catalog warehouses have a presence in the region.

It is reasonable to assume that the region can support a private school such as New Hampshire Christian School (more than 7% of students are in private school) and the eventual goal of 350 students which is the number that has been discussed from time to time, while optimistic, is within the realm of possibility if the school decides to really pursue excellence. There are other small Christian schools in the area that are doing well, particularly pre-schools and elementary schools.

All of the above numbers are taken from government census information. Some of the numbers may have changed slightly because some numbers are from more than 2 years ago but the variations should not affect the conclusions of the report.



## **School Profile**

New Hampshire Christian School is located in Lakeville, NH on the town line between Lakeville, the commercial center of Belknap County, and Mountain View, a wealthy resort area on the shores of Lake Winnepesaukee. NHCS sits on a piece of property owned by Grace Bible Church Fellowship. The property is comprised of 140 acres, mostly wooded. It is on a hillside facing the White Mountains and various lakes and is considered prime real estate. Because it is on a hillside future development would not be greatly impacted by the wetlands act. The school is located in one of the wealthiest areas of New Hampshire

New Hampshire Christian School has an enrollment of 160+ students as of September 2002. This is down from 220 in September 2000. The school is comprised of grades K-12 and except for isolated grades is under-enrolled, especially in the elementary school.

The families that make up the majority of the student body are skilled tradesmen such as licensed electricians, builders, contractors, plumbers. There are some management families such as insurance brokers, a doctor, pastors but they are not the majority. I am not aware of any families of lawyers, accountants, bankers, etc.

Recently a family moved to the area who became very involved in the school bringing with them their love of the performing arts. Drama has become strong, music excels, the art program is excellent. The students have responded and the student body has many talented artistic and musical young people.

The school prides itself in its Christian emphasis and the spiritual component of its curriculum. I will discuss the Christian Education component of the curriculum at a later time but the lifestyles and behaviors of a large portion of the alumni belie the claim. Alumni do not contribute to the financial well-being of the school and many have very negative feelings about their experiences at NHCS.

It is my understanding that Grace Bible Church Fellowship and New Hampshire Christian School were founded to provide an alternative to the perceived secular humanism philosophy of both the Christian and non-Christian community in the Lakeville area and in the local public schools. Much of the original thinking was of protection and safety of the thinking for the children of believing parents. The original mission and philosophical statements reflect this 'flight' into the Christian ghetto. The results of this thinking, however valid the original premise was, have resulted today in low academic standards, and exclusionary policies.

Many issues have been raised at the board meetings about the existing culture within the school and deep concerns have been expressed. It is the desire of the board to effect change within the school culture while retaining the strengths it already possesses. It is the desire of the board that the new mission statement allow the administration to effect change, rid the culture of the exclusionary tendencies and to allow students to compete favorably in the job and college market because of higher standards and relevancy of courses to today's world.

## **Physical Plant**

The school was built by volunteer labor on a shoestring back in the early '70's. The first building went up in 6 weeks and the others soon after. No serious maintenance work has been done on them since. At present, there are 4 buildings, 3 of which each contain a school and the 4<sup>th</sup> is the gym and the Discovery program. Discovery uses 3 small office/rooms for one-on-one teaching. There is also a small conference room in which small classes are held when needed. Two buildings are similar. They have 4 classrooms, 2 upstairs and 2 downstairs. The hallways are narrow, the stairs are poured concrete and there are support pillars in the middle of some of the classrooms. The floors in the halls are linoleum and there is carpeting in the classrooms but no padding under the carpet so they wear out quickly. The 3<sup>rd</sup> building, the Middle School, has had an addition recently, which added 2 more small classrooms – the library and 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The 4<sup>th</sup> building is the gym. An addition was put on the gym 4 years ago. Originally, the addition was to be storage and the contractor built it as storage. When it was completed, the administration put the Discovery program in the space. Because it was designed to be storage there is no phone hookup with the office or any other buildings. I continually hear about the lack of planning and communication between those who have needs and those who make the decisions.

The driveway is paved and a new circular drive has been built to accommodate a new sanctuary for Grace Bible Church Fellowship. Landscaping has been done and grass has been seeded. Lights have been installed in the parking lot but they have not been turned on as yet. A new sign is at the entrance. The sign needs a light and landscaping needs to be done at the entrance. According to Paul this is the responsibility of the church and it will be done this summer (2002).

### **Buildings:**

The roofs and siding have been repaired on two of the school buildings, the middle school and the high school.

### **General needs**

All buildings need to be wired for phones. Each room needs to have phone jacks installed and phones in place to facilitate communication between classrooms and office. Each classroom should also be wired for cable access allowing for specially designed television programs used in classroom teaching and for internet access in each classroom allowing for student and teacher research online from the classroom. In the elementary and middle school classrooms one, preferably two computers are necessary to assist teachers to bring students up to the standards of computer literacy required by the high school. Appropriate software is necessary to assist teachers in teaching all subjects as well as computer literacy.

### **Elementary School**

The elementary school is badly in need of a new roof and of siding. Water comes in through the walls during a blinding rainstorm. The gym badly needs to have the tin roof replaced and siding put on the building. The east end of the gym has recently had an addition, which has been sided.

### **Gymnasium**

The board has approved the expenditure of a new roof over the entrance to the gym. Attention needs to be paid to the inside ceiling of the gym. Apparently water drips down on the gym floor during basketball games. There is some discussion as to whether or not it is condensation from heat in the building hitting cold air along the roof and the problem is insulation or whether it is the roof that is leaking.

### **School office**

The present office space is no longer adequate for the needs of the school. The secretaries do not have adequate space in which to work, and the Development Assistant is completely separated from the rest of the secretarial staff. Sam's office has become the place to put things that no one knows what to do with it. It is not conducive for meeting with parents, students or others. The school has no place to have the many meetings required to conduct school business.

The development/business office needs attention. If it is moved, a possible location for it is the conference room in the discovery center. This would make a much nicer area in which to meet with donors or parents needing financial counsel.

If the office is moved placement of copiers and the Risograph machine must be planned. If the copier that is in the existing office is moved along with the office is it necessary to provide a copier for the high school?

### **High School**

The High School is very short on space. There are no classrooms for study halls and students seem to have nowhere to go if they don't have a class. Students with senior privileges are at loose ends. The largest need is for small classrooms to accommodate classes of 5-7 students. If the office is moved to the middle school the existing office area can be remodeled into two smaller classrooms. Rhonda's area can also create a closet housing the server for the computers.

### **Preschool**

The board has approved the opening of a preschool in the fall of 2003. At this time it is in the preliminary stages of planning. The ultimate goal for this program would be a program for 3s and one for 4s. An appropriate curriculum needs to be designed for each one, a director and teachers procured, classroom space designed and constructed, and financing established for startup costs.

### **Addendum:**

As of August 25, 2002 most of the needs expressed under general needs have been completed. We still do not have enough new computers for the classrooms but the wiring is in place, a new telephone system is in place and the software is in house.

The entrance sign has been landscaped, but we are still waiting for a light.

The school office has been moved to the Middle School into the 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom and it includes a small conference room. The change is dramatic and the first impression of the school has been completely altered. The old office has been converted into one classroom and a much-needed storage closet for the high school.

## **Mission Statement**

The mission of New Hampshire Christian School is to provide a Bible-centered education through which all students persevere in the pursuit of scholarly excellence and spiritual maturity in Jesus Christ.

## **Core Values**

We believe:

- In God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit
- God is the creator of all things, seen and unseen
- In a personal relationship with God through a belief in Jesus Christ
- That the Bible is God's inspired word and through it God reveals himself to us. God's word provides the example of our character and our actions
- That the church family is God's design for his believers to promote relationship with each other and to develop a closer relationship with God
- That the family is the nucleus in which God is revealed to his children

We teach:

- Through the lens of Christianity
- Out of our relationship with God through Jesus Christ
- Bible and Biblical subjects to allow children and young people to come to a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ His Son

## **Draft of Vision Statement**

The vision of New Hampshire Christian School is to provide an educational atmosphere in which students can obtain a quality education equal to or exceeding secular institutions with the added dimension of a Bible-centered curriculum and adhering to a Christian moral view. We strive to encourage our students to develop their minds, their bodies, and their spiritual life equally to create adults who will influence their surroundings and the world in a Godly way. Our desire is to create a community in which students can dream, and receive the tools to make their dreams a reality.

### **Educate** – developing students’ minds to their fullest potential

We at NHCS strive to instill high academic standards in our teachers with the expectation that they will challenge students to achieve academic excellence. We have qualified teachers in their respective subjects to ensure that high academic excellence will be reached. We offer a broad spectrum of subjects allowing students to discover new areas of interests and possible future careers. Provision is also made for those students to whom learning is difficult. Compensatory learning strategies and ongoing support are offered through the Discovery Program

### **Development** – strengthens students’ bodies and talents as God intends

We are committed to providing athletic activities that provide opportunities for students to strengthen their bodies and compete with others in their own age bracket. We promote good sportsmanship and clean play. Fine Art is encouraged and learning opportunities are offered both within the classroom and through exhibits in the community. Theatre productions both with and without music are performed. Music is encouraged and performing opportunities are presented throughout the year. Media development – video production, web page design and graphic arts – develops marketable skills for the future.

### **Equip** – discipling students as they are presented with God’s truths

We at NHCS have a strong commitment to presenting Christ as Savior to all students and encouraging them to develop a personal relationship with Him. We pledge to provide an environment that promotes spiritual growth. We strive to be a strong moral presence in their lives as they grow to maturity. All of the teaching is presented through a Christian world-view.

### **Impact** – outward influence to surrounding community and beyond

Our desire is to raise up students to become Christian leaders in their communities and elsewhere as adults. Their presence would be a testimony to Christ and the biblical moral values learned at NHCS. Our goal is to train students to influence their world and beyond through not only honesty in employment and volunteering to work

with and aid the underprivileged but to shape their surrounding culture including the marketplace with a Christian world view. Encouragement is also given to those aspiring to full time Christian service if it is God's will.

## **Administration**

The organizational structure of the school seems to be haphazard at best. Decisions seem to be made like many families do – the Dad makes most of the decisions or Mom by default rather than through an organizational structure. Nominal leaders are being treated as adult children rather than adults who are independent thinkers and decision makers in their own right. Strong, capable faculty members sense that decisions made by lower level leaders are over-ruled capriciously and that top leadership will not support them. Why should they make decisions then they “will be left standing alone in the middle of the field with no support.” (direct quote of a teacher)

There is also an underlying voiced concern about who is the actual decision-maker at the school. Very few feel that Sam, the Principal, is the individual ‘calling the shots’. Most feel that the school secretary, or the Athletic Director, have run the school. Both women have resigned so things may be different. Until now Sam has been seen as a weak leader who has surrounded himself with strong, controlling women who try to mask his unwillingness to make tough decisions. With both of them gone it will be interesting to see what changes take place.

There is little planning, vision casting, or future thinking amongst the faculty and staff. There is also an underlying sense of quiet despair that nothing will ever change for the better. Those who are fighters by personality continue to strive to move forward but the majority have given up trying to succeed and have become numb. Endurance seems to be the attitude of today rather than an excitement of investing in the future.

The culture and tradition of the school is against recruitment, whether it be students or faculty and staff. Consequently, enrollment is unpredictable and the quality of teachers is haphazard. There is no plan in place of intentional recruitment. Also, no marketing data has been kept such as enrollment data, audience evaluation including mix of economic strata of families, community profiles and comparisons of school to community mix and no attempt has been made to be an effective influence in the region.

In speaking with various personnel, when I asked what their responsibilities were I received answers from “I haven’t the faintest idea!” to “Whatever needs to be done.” Teachers are generally left alone to do as they please in the classroom. A great deal of emphasis is placed on neatness but very little emphasis is placed on quality of teaching, textbooks and teaching resources, or classroom management. Discipline is haphazard and often based on favoritism. Faculty and staff have ‘gotten the job done’ because they are dedicated to the school and have ‘pitched in’ to fill a void. There is very little structure in place to fill holes in responsibility. There are notebooks full of policies, structures, and discipline guidelines but the policies do not seem to be either communicated or enforced. And the ones that are enforced are the weakest ones. There seems to be a lot of ‘going through the motions’ but not much substance.



The function of Guidance Counselor has been given to a school secretary who, to my knowledge, has had no training. She meets with students in a crisis situation and will listen and pray with them but is not equipped to go farther. She also advises on college selection and financial aid but knows very little. She does the best that she knows but has been thrown into a position in which she has no knowledge. Helping students with college selection and helping parents who are facing the prospect of a child going to college for the first time needs someone who has been trained and is familiar with the subject.

Office personnel have been put in a position in which they are issuing pink slips as a disciplinary measure in areas that they shouldn't. Teachers should be required to be firmer and more consistent in their use of pink slips. At the current time all communication with parents looks the same whether it be missed assignments, gum chewing or detention. I would recommend that the infractions be separated so that parents are more easily made aware of difficulties and the seriousness of the offense. In the current system gum chewing and fighting look the same.

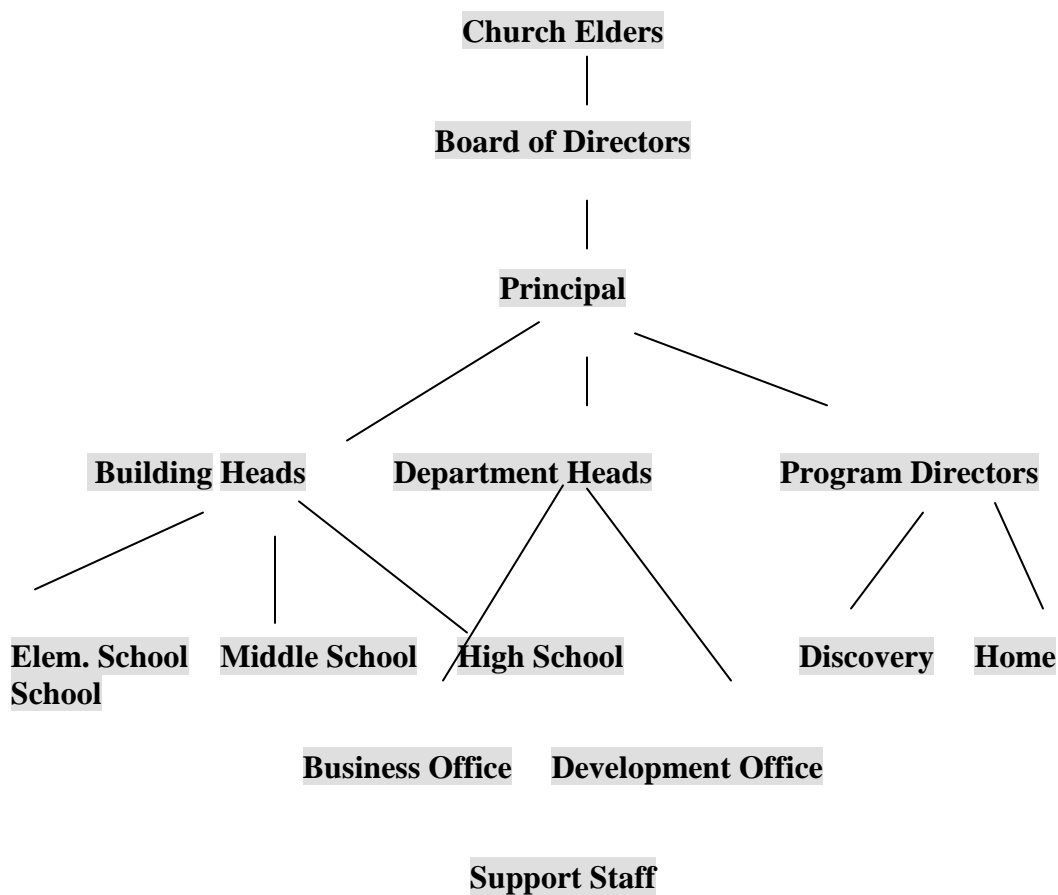
There is a system of chores for students in place. Chores in and of themselves are not a bad idea but it is important that the school be wise in their choice of chores. It is not wise for students to be cleaning toilets in this day and age. Who knows what diseases are present in families. The students do not wear gloves and are using strong chemicals. It is also not a wise idea for students to be supervising other students on quality of work. Friendship gets in the way of good performance or else the student charge either does the task himself or gets bossy. If chores are to be part of the daily life, the chores should be dusting, vacuuming, emptying wastebaskets, etc., not cleaning bathrooms or washing floors. I would recommend that the school hire a custodian part-time to do the heavy cleaning to insure that it is done and done well. Twenty hours per week should be good. This person would also be required to do maintenance to keep up the buildings. They have been allowed to get run down and getting them back in shape is a monumental task. If someone keeps them continually maintained the overall cost will be lower and the school's image will be better.

Office coverage needs to be increased during school vacations. Very few calls come to the school office during Christmas break but during winter, spring and summer vacations the office must be open. Office staff should not necessarily be on teacher's schedules. How this is covered and who covers is open for discussion but it is vital. Also, all office staff should return to work by the middle of August. The workload is increasing as time gets closer to the start of school and all support staff should be at work.

Over this summer the entire school has been wired with a new telephone system. Also included in the project is wiring from cable internet access and cable television. Each classroom is now connected through computers to the Worldwide web. Also, the ability for computer programs to be converted and shown on television sets in the classrooms is available. New software has been purchased for administrative staff and teachers to manage school record keeping, grades, etc. However, all teachers are not computer literate to the level that they should be. In today's world it is necessary for teachers to be up to speed on basic skills both on the computer and on the internet.

Training needs to be provided for all staff to bring them up to the minimum standard in computers.

## Organizational chart



This is the ideal organizational chart. What is happening in actuality is there is a hidden dotted line between the principal and all teachers. The principal then may change decisions of the middle supervisor arbitrarily and without warning.

## **Finance**

In examining the financial situation at the school it is important to look at a variety of different areas and the areas are not necessarily obvious. The first area to examine is the attitude towards finances of the leadership.

The prevailing attitude of both the board and senior staff is that the school is a non-profit organization. That status to them seems to translate into not making a profit. It is so ingrained in them that one board member recently prayed for “enough but not too much” and that individual’s definition of enough doesn’t even include meeting expenses.

The board of directors realizes that there is a money problem. They discuss the situation month in and month out, wring their hands, blame the development director and point fingers but provide no solutions and rarely even attempt to bring in additional money.

In speaking with the business manager, Brian, about finances, I find that he is preoccupied with trying to meet expenses and get bills paid. His other hat is development, bringing in outside money. He has tripled donated money (from \$25,000 GAP money two years ago to close to \$75,000 in 2001-02 school year) but the money is used to play catch-up in bill paying and in just upgrading archaic equipment. Brian is not focused in future planning of finances, just in keeping the school solvent.

I spoke with Sam, the Principal, about finances. His sole contribution to the subject was that tuition should pay for teacher salaries only. He proposed lowering tuition, allowing more students to attend the school. The increased money would certainly cover the teacher’s salaries. Where the money for the rest of the expenses, maintenance, improvements, supplies, etc. was to come from he had no answer. My sense was that he didn’t feel any responsibility for finding it, either. In his mind the school is a ministry and ministries don’t earn money. He also is very quick to forgive tuition or portions of tuition, even for people who don’t need forgiveness, and rarely, if ever, demands payment for those in arrears.

There is a general lack of financial planning and no future financial plan or vision – dreams, yes, but no vision. There is certainly no individual sense of responsibility on anyone’s part to use their influence in planning for future financial stability of the school.

The school continually operates in the red and expects the church to bail it out. When there is no bailout the school uses money designated for next year’s expenses to pay this year’s bills. Consequently, the school gets deeper and deeper in debt with no end in sight.

There is not a real sense on the part of the board or the Principal (the business manager is the exception) as to where the income of the school comes from. The sole reliable source of income is tuition but no efforts have been made until this Spring to

change entrance requirements, upgrade printed or presentation materials, advertising or taken any action to increase the numbers of incoming students. When there was a serious drop of new admissions and a large number of students choosing not to return to NHCS little or no effort has been made to find out the real causes of the withdrawals. If reasons were discovered no effort was made to solve the problems. There was a dramatic increase of tuition that year and it was easy to use that as an excuse. However, in the families to whom I have spoken about their removing their students from the school money was only part of the issue. There were always other issues that influenced the decision as well. The increase in tuition provided a convenient excuse.

The budget is not a planning tool bringing fiscal responsibility to the school. The budget reflects money spent, not spending control or future planning. The principal tells teachers to order what they want without putting a realistic cap on spending or providing financial guidelines for departments. Consequently, there is no accountability on spending, nor is there any sense of what is spent on what. For example, he has decided that all elementary school teachers order supplies for 22 students for each grade regardless of the number of incoming students. To date, he has not allowed the business manager to return the excess items to the publishers although there are only 3 or 4 students in most grades. None of the classes are even close to 22. The building head of the elementary school has also resisted returning any materials. This seems to be gross incompetence and an abuse of fiscal responsibilities. Some teachers are very frugal and do not order the necessary supplies or textbooks needed to maintain high academic standards while others overspend with no accountability.

All of the financial documents reflect money spent. No budget seems to be created until after admission numbers are finalized and income is projected from known financial sources. The budget is not a document used for planning for the future, only assigning expenses from projected income. Without a budget that projects needs and future plans there is no document that NHCS generates that shows what areas need to be targeted for special fund raising or what departments are being irresponsible in their spending habits. New Hampshire Christian School does not seem to understand fiscal planning or have the tools in place that are needed to effectively plan.

## **Development**

At present there is no structured development program. There are isolated fundraisers and committed people are donating money and goods and services on an as needed basis. However, there is no program in place for pursuing grants, seeking endowments, scholarships money, etc. This should become a priority as soon as possible.

Grant research has been started and a few scholarships have been donated so kernels are starting to bud. But there is no structure in place. As the school begins to plan for the future a capital campaign needs to be organized, and attention needs to be given to the school's potential.

This past spring recruitment collaterals were conceived. A professional looking booklet about the school was developed, a PowerPoint presentation for interested families has been created, brochures on each school printed and posters and flyers were designed and placed in day care centers around the lakes region advertising the kindergarten. A video needs to be made, an interactive CD about the school needs to be done, a web page needs to be designed and an advertising budget needs to be put together.

The development director has had a rough beginning because he has had to recreate the image of the school from the driveway on up. Things are coming together so that the focus can shift from within to looking upward and outward. The organizational structure needs to be put in place quickly so as not to lose momentum.

Another area that needs to be addressed whether at the board level or at the Administrative level is the hiring of husband and wife teams. I strongly recommend that this policy cease. At present we have a weak principal and his strong wife who is building head of the elementary school. The elementary school teachers are generally without a voice in the school and have no recourse when in difficulties unless it is directly to the board. My recommendation would be either to replace the building head with someone else or assign the teachers an advocate with another building head if there is need of mediation. A similar situation exists in the Middle School with the building head being assigned to mediate between his wife who is a teacher and parents. This is not acceptable. It sets everyone up for failure.

Scheduling for the fall needs to be completed in May. Teacher contracts need to be finalized in April for the fall semester. Teachers need to know what they are teaching before the summer begins, not two weeks before school starts. The only school that is seriously affected by enrollment is the elementary school. High School teachers should know their subjects early. Also, administration needs to know what subjects need to have teachers recruited for. This lack of planning leads to having incompetent teachers fill in at the last minute and leaves gaps in teacher workload.

This year with phys. ed in the gym on a regularly scheduled basis unannounced changes in scheduling should cease. This has been a complaint I have heard from many fronts – from part time teachers, from home school parents, from volunteers, etc. Schedules seem to change often, especially at the last minute for no apparent reason. This practice fosters anger, resentment, and creates a feeling of lack of respect for those who are affected, especially when many of the teachers affected volunteer their time. This organization is not a family that can change their plans at the last minute. It is an organization that must stick to a set schedule.

Another area that must be examined is the policies of field trips. There seems to be a general lack of planning about the trips and nothing put in place to notify parents of there is a change of plans on returning. This is a serious issue and attention needs to given to the problem immediately before trips leave the school.

## **A Development Structure**

The Development department of an educational institution is the department that showcases the future of the school. It reflects the attitudes towards the future that the leadership has. It reflects how the school feels about itself and where it sees itself in the future – in one year, in five years and in ten years. It does not create these attitudes, it reflects them. The Development office takes these attitudes, enhances them and uses them to raise money for the school. If the attitudes and vision are not present, the Development office has nothing to promote. Creating them is the responsibility of the Board of Directors, not Development. If the Development office creates them it is the equivalent of marketing something that is not true – the proverbial ‘bait and switch’ practice of a used car salesman.

The following is a simple structure of what a development plan would look like once the board sets the course.

### **Scholarship money**

The goal for a scholarship fund is to have a sum of money that can be invested. Scholarships can then be awarded to the sum of 80% of the total interest money earned each year. This way the principle will grow and scholarship money will increase annually.

To begin the process it is necessary to target specific families that might be willing to donate money in honor of a family member who has had relationship with NHCS. In starting this program it is important to select families carefully. You don’t want to come back to them for other donations such as a capital campaign.

### **Endowments**

This is a program wherein you talk with people about leaving money to NHCS in their wills. This is a very specialized program and needs a professional to set up the structure and the guidelines. Usually in order to do this you need something tangible to present to the individuals such as professionally printed materials showing successful outcomes of graduates, future plans based on reality of the school, a mission and vision that coincides with the vision of the individual, etc. We are not well enough organized yet to present this but within another year we should be.

## **Grants**

Grant money is available for organizations that have specific plans and have proof that they have their organization moving forward. In order to target specific grants there must be a master plan in place from which to identify future needs. Application for grant money usually takes about a year in advance of the actual need to see the return. Advanced planning is vital. Because we have no master plan at present we should not expect great returns from grants in the near future.

## **Capital Campaign**

A capital campaign is designed to raise money for capital improvements. Capital improvements include renovations of existing buildings and building new ones or additions onto existing structures. In order to have a successful campaign you must show a need for the improvements, demonstrate planning for the future and forward thinking, and attention to detail such as including everything that needs to be done or else targeting only specific needs. For example, if renovations are needed and money is being requested for NHCS it is important to include such diverse needs as the gym and an elementary school library. For new construction you need to show purpose for the structure, a visual drawing (artist's rendition) of the proposed building and highlight new features included in the plan. Also, it is necessary to include such information as final cost, minimum amount of pledges needed to start construction, deadlines, etc.

Two common threads run through all of these areas – strategic planning for the future and evidence of a viable organization in place today. Regardless of our short-term needs for NHCS we cannot show strategic planning for the future because we haven't done any and we cannot show a viable organization in place today because we don't have one. These two areas need to be addressed immediately before we can move forward at all. Even for the foundation of the addition on the elementary school we don't have enough in place to solicit funds. We need to get our act together first.

We have an organization that reacts to today, cleans up from yesterday and hopes to make it tomorrow. If we are serious about the future for NHCS we need to think in terms of short term (6-9 months in advance), medium term (3-5 years in advance) and long term (5-10 years ahead). Our normal style should be planning 6-9 months out. Budget requests for the following year need to be submitted in October of the previous year. Courses offered in the high school should be planned and approved in January of the previous school year. Teacher contracts should be signed in April of the previous year and student schedules for the following year finalized before year's end in June of the previous school year. Advanced planning needs to be a way of life for the school in every facet of its activity. GIG speakers should be finalized a



semester in advance, graduation speaker confirmed in January, etc. Field trips should be in place 3 months in advance and well planned. Nothing in this school should be last minute and certainly nothing big should be spontaneous. Too many things go wrong or have the potential to go wrong when things are not well planned.

The success of a good development plan does not include short-term plans, only medium and long term plans. There are some areas where development can proceed without depending on the vision of the future, such as scholarships, but not many. Until the board does its job of future planning, Development cannot move forward effectively.

## 7.1

### Academics

New Hampshire Christian School presents itself as a college preparatory private Christian school. It uses as advertising information the number of students who graduate and go on to college. The information presented would lead a family to assume that the academic standards are high and students score high on standardized testing. This is not an accurate assessment.

The norm that is usually cited at NHCS is that its students score 2 years above the nationwide norm. When you consider that the nationwide norm includes non-English speaking immigrant children, inner-city students and some with moderate learning disabilities the scores reflect a mediocre school at best. Our students come from English speaking, college bound, middle class families and the scores should be higher. In comparison to other ACSI schools some of our grades were as much as 4 years behind the norm. Our middle school scored very high and some of our 7<sup>th</sup> grade students were reading and doing math computation at 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade levels. The elementary school fared well but not outstanding and our high school was barely adequate.

Our average SAT scores for college-bound students in 2001 was around 1000 or slightly higher and no one scored in the 700's on either the verbal or math portion. There were a few (less than 5) 700's on the SAT II's.

AP test scores were not high and I am not aware of any 5's in any subject – perhaps in Biology but I'm not sure. I think the highest was a 4. No one got a 3 or better in math that I'm aware. We have the quality of student that could achieve higher scores but I don't know if our curriculum and teacher demands would support higher scores. The history books in the high school are of such poor quality that the history teacher told me that there was not enough meat in the text to give him enough material for a quiz every Friday. I examined the books and agreed. Not only were they poor texts, but they also taught a revisionist history by presenting false and incomplete information. Even if the slant of history is pro-Christian it is still revisionist and not truth. If New Hampshire had statewide testing like New York and Massachusetts do our students would fail. We have purchased new textbooks for both World History and American History, complete with support materials, for this fall. A complete review needs to be conducted of all textbooks and curriculum in all grades.

In the past the scores have been higher and teacher demands have been greater. However, because of the leadership vacuum teachers have become discouraged and have had to spend more time in discipline than in teaching. With an administration and a board that is committed to supporting teachers and backing them up in their

decisions concerning students it may free teachers to make higher demands of their students. However, there is no substitute for quality tools with which to teach.

The school has now been wired for cable internet access and cable television access in each classroom. In the middle and high schools classrooms are wired for computer-generated programs to be converted and shown on television. Teachers need to start generating their own teaching tools to enhance their presentations. Computer generated learning games should be presented from kindergarten on up in each classroom and it should be a mandatory part of curriculum. Our students often know more about computers than our teachers and teachers need to stay current. Computers are here to stay and our students need to be prepared.

## **Art**

NHCS has an outstanding art program for grades K-12. Students have submitted projects to state competitions and have won many awards. The program has been limited by space. It has not had its own classroom or any place to display its accomplishments. Course offerings have also been limited because of lack of classroom space. I spoke at length with the art teacher about her 'wish list' if she had space. She would like to include sculpture and perhaps at some point pottery on a potter's wheel. There are interested and talented students but no space. Downstairs in the Middle School a classroom has been allotted to art for the 2002-2003 school year allowing for an expansion of the program. The art teacher will no longer have to carry all her materials from classroom to classroom. The students will come to her allowing more teaching time and space for storing projects needing to be dried, etc.

## **Music**

Until now the music program has been limited to what each elementary school teacher can teach, a Middle School chorus and a High School chorus. Instrument lessons were available after school if parents desired. A halftime music teacher position has been created for grades K-8. This position will teach music to each grade level with structured classes and goals for each grade, K-8. This teacher will share the art room with the art program. This teacher will also direct the Middle School chorus. It is the desire of the administration that this position will also direct dramatic musical productions for grades K-8.

## **Drama**

Drama has been offered as an elective class teaching acting techniques, etc. in the high school. Because of the change in electives drama will not be offered. However, the opportunity to participate in plays and musical productions will continue to be offered.

## **Physical Education**

Physical education has been a component of education that has been missing in the curriculum of grades K-8 at NHCS. A part time position has been created to fill this gap. Grades K-8 will now have phys. ed. once a week in an organized program with prescribed learning and development goals. This program is not designed to replace

athletics in the Middle School but to encourage physical activity in those children who do not play in sports for whatever reason.

## **Computers**

NHCS has had 20 complete computer systems donated to the school. Larger hard drives have also been donated. Software has also been donated so that NHCS has a state of the art computer lab complete with business software in Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Access as well as the graphic design software programs Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, and PageMaker. One computer in the lab is set up as a video-editing computer using Adobe Premiere. This computer lab is better equipped and more complete than most public schools including such wealthy towns such as Hanover. Our student body, especially the boys, are very sophisticated in their computer skills. We have the equipment and software to challenge them. NHCS needs to sure that they don't neglect this aspect of education. Belknap County is a center for computer related industries, especially graphic arts and design and web page design. A half time teacher should be employed to teach this subject. At present we have a teacher who can teach programming, a subject that should also be made available to students, especially boys.

A subset of the computer lab is the ability to create and edit video. Media development is becoming a larger and larger field in society today and at present we have a core of boys who are very interested in this area and are good at it. I would recommend an immediate program to enhance the skills of these boys. Animation, film directing, lighting, sound are all key components of this and the school has the equipment right now to accommodate this. The only piece missing is purchasing two software programs, one called Director, and the other called Flash. These programs are designed for web site development and animation on the web. We are state of the art in computers. We need to capitalize on it.

## **Home School**

New Hampshire Christian School has an increasing number of Christian families who are choosing to home school their children, and, yet, would like to come under the umbrella of NHCS. If a mother can home school her children it is during the elementary school years. The family is then looking for a middle school and a high school for their children. There is no staff person at NHCS who acts as a liaison between the school and home school mothers. There is a home school mother who acts as a buffer between the school and the home school. At present this liaison works with the building head of the elementary school but this has not been positive as the building head seems to be hostile towards home school mothers. Parents who have students with learning disabilities work directly with Discovery teachers and this experience has been good.

I would suggest that a staff person be designated as the contact between all home school parents (apart from Discovery). These families represent future students in the school, especially in middle and high school and the position from a marketing perspective is invaluable. This staff person would then be in a position to recommend curriculum, build a home school network in the community and make NHCS more visible in a very positive light. If the school is committed to community service and community mission work this is a viable place to start.

## Athletics

### Athletics

Our sports program is quite good. We hold our own in our division, sometimes winning our conference and occasionally winning the state championship in one sport or another. Quality coaching is sporadic because we never have enough money to pay coaches and recruiting seems to be sporadic. Looking at the athletic department is low on my priority list because while it could be more consistent it is bumbling along adequately. Bob has donated money to upgrade the soccer/baseball/softball field and install a sprinkler system so that will help. We are also helping some local contractors by taking their fill from construction projects and filling in a gully that will enable us to enlarge the field to accommodate a baseball field complete with dugouts. It will also allow us to have 2 soccer fields side by side allowing two teams to practice. We have a gym of sorts for basketball and volleyball. The roof leaks and the cedar shakes on the side of the building let water in through the walls. A rat ran across the floor of the gym during the awards ceremony! It needs help! We use it but have no money to fix it. The amount of money needed to fix it is so vast that we can't even begin to plan.

The athletic field is enclosed in a 4' chain linked fence. It is large enough for a soccer field and a softball field but not large enough for baseball and too small for 2 soccer fields side-by-side. This means that there is not enough room for 2 teams to practice at the same time and when there is a game one team cannot play. The middle school is usually the loser. Local contractors are using the embankment on the far side of the field to dump their clean fill, which is helping. Hopefully, soon we will be able to grade the fill and expand the field. Money was given to upgrade the field. Recently, a sprinkler system was installed and is up and running. At the end of soccer season new turf will be laid down and the surface will improve.

### Team Sports:

#### Fall sports:

High School boys – Soccer  
 High School girls – Volleyball  
 Middle School boys – Soccer  
 Middle School girls – Volleyball

#### Winter sports:

High School boys – Basketball  
 High School girls – Basketball  
 Cheerleading  
 Middle School boys – Basketball  
 Middle School girls – Basketball  
 Cheerleading

#### Spring sports:

High School boys – Volleyball  
 High School girls – Softball  
 Middle School boys – none  
 Middle School girls – none

## Spiritual Life

Bible lessons begin in kindergarten and continue through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Memory verses are an integral part of grades k-8. In high school grades 9-10 students are required to take Old Testament, grade 11 is New Testament and grade 12 is comprised of 4 quarters of bible electives. Every Wednesday the high school has Chapel called GIG. Every other week GIG includes the middle school.

There is a worship team made up of students who play guitar, drums and sing. I believe that the songs are chosen by students and played during GIG as part of the worship service. There are occasional guest speakers at GIG but primarily the speakers are associated with the school.

Certain students participate in missions' trips either a weekend trip to New York City, Boston or out of the country. When students participate on a trip such as this they return excited but often it is not reflected throughout the entire school.

On paper and in curriculum I see all the right things but I see little joy of the Lord in the students. From what I have observed, heard expressed by teachers and have deduced the goal of most in leadership is to bring students to salvation. Once a student has been saved the goal has been reached. My interpretation of scripture suggests that all that has happened is that the student has reached the starting line. Our goal should not be salvation only but growth in the Lord. As one student expressed it so aptly, " 'Born again' is real. It is a birth. We don't stop developing at birth. That is the starting point. Then we have to grow up." I don't see the 'growing up' portion being handled well. It becomes controlled by rules and behavior rather than by spiritual growth and a joy in the Lord. I hear teachers and the Principal judging a student's depth of faith and his or her salvation by their somewhat normal teenage behavior. Some teachers allow students to discuss issues of concern but primarily faith is judged by behavior. There seems to be an underlying legalism about the Christianity at the school that seems to crush the joy. This may not be the only thing but it's one I see.

In the last year the board has taken a different approach to serious student behavior, one of attempted restoration rather than immediate expulsion and exclusion. There have been consequences but meaningful ones that hopefully lead to redemption rather than menial tasks for punishment. It is a beginning, and only time will tell if the decision was a wise one; but the history of severe punishment of exclusion and expulsion that has been in place since the beginning of the school has only created bitterness, resentment, and anger at both the school and God. The school carries the stigma to this day and is still trying to recover from it.

I have talked with several students recently about the spiritual state of the school. All feel that there seems too little connection between faith and behavior. What was expressed was that the type of Christianity expected at NHCS didn't fit in the world in which the students live. The dress code was "phony," approaches to life applied to the world of the 1950's, and that Christianity doesn't fit in today's world. Of course, I

personally believe that it does, but I understand what the students mean. In the name of Christianity they have not been taught how to think or discern what is true or not true – only what is acceptable to the leadership of the school. For example, students are not to drink alcohol. The reason given is that Christians don't drink alcohol. In reality some Christians do drink alcohol and some do not. It is not a Christian issue. We do not permit students to drink alcohol because it is illegal. All of our students are under age. I continually hear from students about hypocrisy being everywhere and this is a good example. It also applies to smoking. They see their parents or aunts and uncles smoke, and, yet, the school ties it to Christian behavior. In reality it is not related to Christian behavior. The truth of the matter is that it is illegal for our students to buy cigarettes, marijuana or anything else.

The policies of the school need to be carefully examined in view of what is biblical and what is 'Christian culture' and honestly separate the two. Every denomination has its own 'Christian culture' and it will be a minefield. However, it is vital for the spiritual life of the students that we honestly present our standards in their proper light, not necessarily lower the standard but be honest in our expectations. Students are expelled from public school for illegal behavior and we should do no less. However, do not present a picture of hypocrisy to justify consequences. Students are very smart.

All the studies show that young people today want desperately to believe in something real, something substantial. We believe we have the answer in Christianity. Let's not put up artificial roadblocks to their faith, nor judge their faith by normal behavior or by questioning. If the questions are answered satisfactorily the faith is for life. If not, the rejection may be for life.



## **Board Functions and Role**

Currently the Board of Directors functions as an administrative board. It monitors and advises on financial matters. It attends to maintenance issues and initiates all future physical plant issues. The board also is actively involved in day-to-day matters such as serious student discipline including expulsion, serious parental complaints, teacher evaluations and general oversight of the school. The board seems to operate as the administrative body of the school. The principal seems to lack influence with the board regarding solutions to current problems and vision for forward looking plans. What is not clear is whether the board adopted the strong administrative position because the principal is not a strong leader or whether the principal has been rendered ineffectual by the role of the board.

The board has little vision for the future of the school. It seems to have a very narrow, limited outlook. Most of its decisions are reactive rather than forward planning. There is little understanding of the purpose or function of a board of directors. Each board member has a tremendous heart for the school and a deep desire for it to succeed. However, there is limited knowledge of educational goals, measuring tools of educational standards or even how to interpret scores when they are presented.

When students are brought to the board for serious disciplinary measures no record is presented about past behavior, redemptive possibilities are not presented by school officials but occasionally the pastor of the church is able to provide insight. School officials do not seem to present solutions to problems or options available but wait for the board to figure it out for themselves and tell the school leadership the decided-upon solution.

### **Future role of the board**

The board has voted to move towards the style of functioning as a governance board. It desires to be involved in vision casting, policymaking, and fund raising. The day-to-day running of the school and decisions concerning operations, standards and administration are to gradually be transferred to the principal and the business manager. This will be a slow process and will take careful planning. In order to accomplish this task two things must take place – the criteria determining board membership needs to be revised; and, the principal must be a strong leader with good decision-making skills, a persuasive leader with right priorities, an excellent communicator and good relational people skills.

### **Recommendation**

The number of board members should be increased to 12, not including the principal of the school. Of this 12 at least 2 should be familiar with educational institutions and academic issues and at least 1 should represent Grace Bible Church Fellowship. The other 9 should represent various factions of the community at large and the community within the school. I would also recommend that 1 teacher be a non-voting member of the board and that position rotate yearly. (The same teacher could serve more than one year but a review of the representative should occur annually.)

The terms of each school board member should be 3 years with the understanding that the entire board is re-elected over a period of 3 years and no board member except the representative from GBC serve more than 2 terms consecutively. (On a board of 12 four positions are changed each year.) I also recommend that the terms of each board member go from June to June rather than staggered in various months throughout the year.

An executive committee should be created from the larger board who decides matters that the entire board need not discuss, such as everyday school matters. The purpose of this executive committee would be to expedite the board meetings. Graver matters and larger, long-range issues would come before the entire board.

I would also recommend that the Board submit names of a potential board chair to the elders of GBC who then approve or reject the nominee rather than have the elders appoint the chairman without consulting the Board of Directors. The school board needs to feel that it controls its own actions rather than have a mandate from above.

## **Qualifications of future board members**

### **Potential qualifications of future board members**

- A strong evangelical Christian
- Successful in his or her profession
- Understands the balance between business, education and Christian focus
- Can bring to the board a particular expertise
  - Education
  - Building and grounds
  - Banking/Finance
  - Community influence

### **Recommended makeup of the board**

The board should include parents, community leaders, educators and local pastors. I would recommend the following makeup:

- A member of the elders of Grace Bible Church Fellowship
- A banker
- A contractor or someone connected with building
- A community leader serving as a liaison between the school and the community
- An educator
- One or two pastors of local churches (other than New Hampshire Christian School)
- Two parents (parents may also double in one of the above categories)
- Someone who is a strong visionary

## Summary and Recommendations

This report is as complete as it can be with the time I have had. I have tried to at least to highlight key areas that need to be addressed. Throughout the report I have made recommendations and or have reported changes that have already been made or are in the process of being made at this time. Some key areas for change must be acknowledged and addressed.

### **Immediate Changes needed:**

1. Attitudes of leadership
  - a. The board must decide its role and chart a course to follow that path. It must get itself organized and functional.
  - b. A strong leader must take the reins of the organization (principal) – someone who makes wise decisions for the good of the school and not weak decisions based on favoritism and inability to confront conflict.
  - c. Stand behind teachers and staff in their decisions.
2. Good financial planning both for the present and the future
  - a. A projected budget created in March for the following year
  - b. A good development structure created to help with long range planning
  - c. A tight rein on expenditures, not driven by money in the bank but by careful planning
3. Planning ahead for the future six to nine months in advance
  - a. Teacher schedules in the high school planned in the Spring, not late summer
  - b. New classes to be implemented in the fall announced in the spring
  - c. Students choose classes before summer
4. A spiritual component for students that is not driven by rules but through understanding and growth in an individual's personal walk with the Lord
5. Raising of academic standards of the entire school
  - a. Improving textbooks
  - b. Upgrading curriculum
  - c. Establishing review boards in academics, financial management, and administration

### **Future Needs:**

1. Better image in the community
  - a. Change the image of exclusiveness to one of community involvement
  - b. Mend some torn relationships starting with Lakeville High School Voc Tech school
2. Working to build a strong, well defined organization that can withstand the ups and downs of a varied enrollment

3. Work to become financially independent of the church
4. The board needs to focus on vision, planning for the future and providing for a secure financial base for the school

## Appendix 2

### Understanding our students

School board  
August 6, 2003

Throughout the past several months I have been asking a lot of questions, listening to a lot of answers, gleaning information from teachers, parents, and students, and sifting through a great deal of information trying to make sense of it all. Some information I have acted upon, some information I have discarded and some information I have filed away to retrieve at a later date. I have been seeking understanding of where the school stands on issues such as quality of education, its influence on spiritual matters, the faculty's understanding of a Christian worldview (most never responded), and other areas that are crucial to understanding the makeup of the school.

What I have found is that there are a myriad of complex issues that need to be identified, understood and addressed. Several individuals have felt that God's vision for LCS is to be a lighthouse on a hill. God has given me the vision that He wants LCS to train future leaders with a Christian worldview to be equipped to influence culture. Those who like the lighthouse image feel that we would light the region, which is fully compatible with the vision given me only the scope of the light is broader when you think of influencing culture. If we are to begin this journey, how do we take the first step?

As I have talked to kids about their frustrations, read the results of the survey taken by alumni, seen the results of the survey forms completed by last year's seniors, listened to parents, talked to teachers I realize that our students are no different from society at large. Our students are classic members of the postmodern generation and our teachers are not. The way we approach GIG, the style of teaching we present, our way of instilling discipline are all approaches that no longer are valued, understood or respected by youth today.

We expect our students to live, value and understand our "modern" views, but we forget that we have "postmodern" students. I am not trying to communicate a school or style of philosophy that vacuous intellectuals espouse but am trying to find a way to educate each of us by showing how the world has changed since we were young. We are much more culturally like our parents than our children are culturally like us and as educators who influence children we need to understand them and the world in which they live. In presenting this, I am not attempting to make a moral statement or make a value judgment but merely to promote understanding. Whether we agree with

the values or outcomes is irrelevant. It is what it is and we need to begin at that point. Moreover, if we are to be effective, we need to be aware of where the starting line is.

People talk about postmodernism expecting everyone else to already know what it is. Trying to define it, however, is like trying to eat unsolidified Jello with a fork. You almost have it but it never quite makes it into your mouth. To understand postmodernism you need to understand where it came from. The following quotes come from an issue of the magazine **Christian Counseling Today** (2001 Vol. 9 No. 3) but they provide insight for us as educators as well. Archibald Hart, PhD., in an article *Postmodernism: Fact or Fancy?* puts things into perspective.

A cultural shift took place several hundred years ago and that continues to shape the world we live in today. With the 18<sup>th</sup> century advent of the “enlightenment,” when science and learning emerged, we entered into a modern era. “Modernism,” then, refers to the period when rationalism, the practice of only accepting intellectual reason as the source of truth, dominated. In many respects, modernism was an enemy of the gospel. The idea of a “revelation” from God seemingly contradicted the “modern” thinking. The problem is that it also seems to contradict postmodernism.

Postmodernism is what followed. It was a reaction to such “modern” ideas. While it was originally a movement that described changes in art and architecture, it is now used to describe much broader changes in our culture. It is a cultural shift shaping our worldview that rejects order and rational thinking, doesn’t accept metanarratives (“big” stories that try to explain life’s mysteries), and has a deep concern for social justice and liberation. Postmodernism also rejects the idea of absolute or revealed truth (like the gospel). As you will see, some aspects of postmodernism, such as the rejection of rationalism as the only source of truth, are favorable to the gospel. But some are not. ...

Postmodernism, like it or not, is all about the way our world is becoming. Our challenge is to be relevant to and effective in reaching an ever-changing world that is constantly lost without Christ’s salvation.

J.P. Moreland says this in an article entitled: *A Philosophical Review of Postmodernism for Christian Counselors*:

As a philosophical standpoint, postmodernism is primarily a reinterpretation of what knowledge is and what counts as knowledge. More broadly, it represents a form of cultural relativism about such things as reality, truth, reason, value, linguistic meaning, the self and other notions. On a postmodernist view, there is no such thing as objective reality, truth, value, reason, and so forth. All these are social reconstructions, creations of linguistic practices, and, as such, relative not to individuals, but to social groups that share a narrative.

If you study history, you will notice that key events are used as markers to signify beginnings and endings of major trends. While these events are useful, it is important to realize that trends do not just happen because of one event, but take place gradually. The event that is usually associated with the advent of postmodern thinking is the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. While it is easy to understand that this thinking did not become solidified on the day the wall fell, it is apparent that this style of thinking is comparatively recent, long after most of us had graduated from school or formed our learning patterns and theological concepts. Our students, however, are products of the postmodern world. Many of them were not even born when the wall fell. Our older students, while they may have been born, have had their ideas formed in this postmodern world. It is important for us to understand their value system and their changing styles of synthesizing information in order to stimulate them academically, form new ways to instill appropriate behavior, and reach them spiritually. A good example of this is that when most of us were young we had to learn to defend Christianity intellectually and rationally. For this generation we need to prove that it is relevant to their lives and is different and better than other religions.

I have enclosed copies of 3 chapters from George Barna's book **Generation NeXt**, which may give you some valuable insight. The book was written in 1996 and is now out of print but what he has written is very illuminating as it describes many of our middle and high school students. We are experiencing in our students a greater apathy towards learning, an increased level of dysfunctional behavior and a seeming disconnectedness between biblical truths and behaviors outside of school. We need to rethink how we teach in our classrooms, how we maintain discipline, and we need to completely revamp GIG. If our goals are to reach our students for Christ in GIG and to cut through the apathy towards learning in the classroom, the status quo must become a thing of the past. You'll notice that Barna speaks of the different way that students are learning today and that the rational, logical style of the modern world is giving way to a less structured, more comprehensive way of gathering and synthesizing information in the postmodern world. Shorter attention spans demand less lecture and more discussion, more media driven learning tools and more wrestling of ideas in the classroom.

Another component of this is that it will become necessary to evaluate teachers, not on how well they know their subject but on how well students learn the material. The more creative and innovative the teacher becomes in reaching the students with the material the more influence LCS will have in their lives in all areas – academically, spiritually, and behaviorally.



# EXCUSE ME, DO WE LIVE ON THE SAME PLANET?

Bear with me for a minute as I relate two personal experiences that have jump-started my thinking about the state of youth today.

## THAT WAS THEN...

It was probably in May of 1968. I was sitting on the sprawling front lawn of Princeton High School, just about to complete my freshman year in a competitive, upscale public high school in New Jersey. I was an oddity at the school, having a cadre of friends from each of the major social cliques: the jocks (athletes), greasers (car buffs), freaks (drug-crazed, antiestablishment hippies) and nerds (scholars). I had the marvelous advantage of knowing just about everything that was going on within the complex, subvisual, relational and behavioral terrain of the school. Even then, I liked having the pulse of the audience.

I had recently turned that broad base of relationships and insights into electoral victory. I had been voted class president, which for some reason seemed meaningful and important back then. But that day in May, as I sat on the lawn during a lunch break conversing with an eclectic group of friends, my mind turned to philosophical matters.

Jimi Hendrix's latest release was playing on my battery-driven portable tape recorder (it was, after all, a decade before the Walkman craze, and two decades before the first boom box hit the streets). A soft breeze was blowing the fragrance of freshly emerging honeysuckle across the landscape.

Most of us were stretched out on the lawn, propped up on our elbows, our legs pointing inward toward a common, if unconscious, midpoint, like the spokes of a wheel at rest. The spring sun felt good after a long winter; its warm rays brought a welcome tingle to my skin as I closed my eyes, listened to a few moments of Hendrix intoning the words to "All Along the Watchtower" and reflected.

For some reason long since forgotten, I was moved to share some innocent and naive pearls of wisdom with my comrades. "Ya know, life's okay. I think we're gonna make it once we get outta here and call our own shots. There's a lotta problems out there in the world, but we've got a chance to make a difference and to create something special in life. All this stuff here"—I paused, dramatically throwing my head in the direction of the school buildings a few hundred feet away—"all the classes and the grades and all, it's senseless—sheer nonsense. We're in a holding pattern, just marking time until we're ready to bring in a whole new way of thinking, a whole new set of values to live by. I can feel it. There's a new era coming, growing out of the new consciousness about war, the environment, public disgust with political corruption, openness to new kinds of relationships, even a de-emphasis upon money. Yeah, I gotta good feeling about the future."

Those were the philosophical musings of a 14-year-old on the brink of maturity. René Descartes I was not. And so we segued into a heated debate about who would win the American League pennant that year as the Grateful Dead followed Hendrix.

## ...THIS IS NOW

Jump ahead a quarter of a century to May 1992. I'm lying in a similar circle with four high-school guys I'm mentoring, an odd collection of lads who have latched on to me from our church's youth program. All of them attend one of the two high schools in Glendale, the upscale Los Angeles, California-area community where we live. Glendale may be well-to-do, but none of these young adults come from any semblance of affluence—all have a middle- or working-class background. But the diversity of my quartet transcends their demographics; their life views and behavioral patterns span the gamut.

Cuy is eager to graduate so he can enter the military to get the discipline and guidance he desires in his life. His polar opposite within our foursome, Mark, is our resident restless spirit, quixotic and unreliable, lovable but frus-

trating. Unbeknownst to us at that moment, he will soon run away from his broken home in the vain hope of finding the total independence and freedom he desperately craves. Jeff and Alberto are followers rather than leaders; they are consistently drawn to the most convenient alternative that avails itself and seem to have no real plans or motivations beyond getting their next meal. Neither has much in the way of distinctives—both are average students, average athletes, average looking, average, average, average.

We're stretched out on the concrete walk outside the church's youth arena. Hendrix is absent from the boom box; this week Guns N' Roses is the heavy-metal band of choice. The spring breeze that blows through Glendale is neither new nor noteworthy, because Southern California only entertains two seasons—rainy and sunny, mostly sunny. In fact, few irregularities in our setting would distract my young friends from the focus of our time together: no girls to size up or impress, no authority figures to hide from or kiss up to, no pressing exams to study for, no part-time jobs to scurry off to and no group activities requiring our presence. When the initial banter is completed and a comfort level is established, I venture forth with a question that is, to me, significant and one that I hope will prove to be revealing. "So what do you make of life these days?"

To my relief, they take me seriously; there is no giggling or guffawing at the old dude asking the politically incorrect questions. But why would these guys laugh? There is a generation that takes just about everything seriously. There is a generation that constantly tackles such questions. No, they would take such a question at face value. And, after all, as the guitar player in the church's teen program, I've earned some degree of respect.

Mark, the impulsive, lead-with-your-heart-not-your-brains imp of the foursome, leads off: "Sometimes I wonder why we bother. Families don't work any longer. The schools are irrelevant to what we'll face in our careers. Friends, even my best friends, are so flaky and irresponsible that I can't count on them. Things cost too much, and I can't get enough cash to make it all happen. Girls have outrageous and unpredictable expectations. The environment is messed up, the political establishment is a failure. What's gonna bring it all back into focus, back into line?"

Jeff and Al vigorously nod their heads in agreement. This apparently serves as their contribution to the conversation.

Guy, less intelligent than Mark but considerably more thoughtful, good-naturedly, but earnestly, challenges the remarks of his schoolmate. "But Mark, be realistic. You've got two options: Make it better or check out. You're probably not gonna give up, so what can you do about it? That's really the ques-

tion for our generation. Yes, most families are dysfunctional, but why? What can we do to keep from raising dysfunctional families of our own? The economy is out of control and people's finances are a mess, but what can we do to restore some sanity to how we think about money and how we develop our views of greed and materialism? And think about your sex life, man, you of all people. Are you gonna continue to chase every babe that walks down the hallway, trying to score as if it were a baseball game? What about AIDS, Mark? What about STDs? What about the implications of your treatment of that girl as a sex object?"

Guy was stuttering as he struggled to get the words out as fast as his brain and his heart pumped the thoughts to his mouth. He was on a philosophical roll now. "And what about balance in life? Is it gonna be working 14 hours a day and drinking beer till 2 in the morning, or will we try to have a richer life, one that allows for diversity and that provides some meaning? And violence? It's in our faces every day—you know that. They have armed guards at Hoover (High School). Jannie was raped by some pervert last week. Billy G's dad was just carted off to jail for blowing away his boss in some fight they had at work. It's nuts out there—and it's all ours in a few years."

Guy paused as if he were the defense attorney about to levy the crushing summary statement. "No denyin' it, man, the people that came before us really screwed up the world, but it's gonna be up to us to clean it up and make it work again." He paused again, but this time he flashed an apologetic smile in my direction, realizing that his "people that came before us" reference was an allusion to my generation. "Well, you know..." he gamely explained before fixing his gaze back on Mark.

Jeff and Al again nodded their heads, with the same degree of intensity they had demonstrated after Mark's soliloquy. They feel strongly about Guy's dissenting view, too.

## WHERE IS THIS CONVERSATION GOING?

The conversation went on for a good half hour, each fellow adding his thoughts, and often his fears, to the dialogue. At moments, I could relate to their sense of outrage at the state of the world they were going to inherit—a real mess. Sure, there are plenty of resources, but those were mostly beyond their reach, and there remains a sufficient quantity of good opportunities, but those, too, were generally outside of their control.

The thing that struck me most powerfully was the depth and sophistication of their grasp of the future. When I was growing up, back in the '60s

and '70s, "quality of life" was not a concept my friends and I devoted much time to considering. Sure, we marched against the war, we railed against racism, we spanned the awareness of the generation gap and we welcomed the feminist mentality. But honestly, those thrusts were selfish. They were not about survival as much as they were meant to signal our arrival as a force too numerous and too energetic to be ignored. And for the vast majority of kids who were not political rebels and radicals, the existence, quality and nature of life was generally not a reality to be pondered and negotiated. The routine was simple: You got up in the morning, dealt with your parents as best you could, assessed the day's possibilities and connived your way into the best available situations, relationships and opportunities.

In contrast, my four junior colleagues of the '90s had an entirely different view of life and reality. Life, for today's teenagers, is serious stuff. They are not worried about who will be the homecoming king and queen, or what song is going to head Billboard's Top 40 next week. The magnitude of their anxieties are light-years beyond the comparatively lightweight mat-  
ters that mesmerized my generation 20 or 30 years ago, whether to wear  
our hair long or short, how to get out of going to church next Sunday, or  
figuring out how to save up enough money to afford a nonchalant stroll to  
the Dairy Queen with the girl whose affections you were trying to win. The real visionaries of my class were scheming to save up enough money for a car or to have a college fund. But they were clearly in a class of their own.

Kids these days are arguing about the ethics of information privacy on the Internet (the telecommunications network that connects all on-line computer users, a veritable Infobahn of the age). They're engaging in verbal warfare about human dignity, personal responsibility and the lifestyle implications of globalism. They converse about quality of life as a matter of course. They know more about family structures and influence than we ever dared to contemplate. They may not be as well-schooled or even as articulate as our generation was, but today's youth are not idiots. They are more experienced, more thoughtful and less driven to conquer the world than we were at their age. That in itself speaks volumes about their intelligence and maturity.

Perhaps more than anything, I realized very quickly that my fame of reference for dealing with these kids was wholly inappropriate. I had jumped into teen ministry at my church thinking I would be working with kids who were just like I was 25 years ago, albeit a bit more high tech, more cynical, more worldly and dressed a bit grungier. Wake up, George! Realization number one: These are not kids. Perhaps the only thing youthful about them is their age.

## THE SIX S'S

This is, indeed, the *Reality Bites* generation (have you seen the movie?). This is the group that has made Beavis and Butt-head national icons. It's the group that supported, with high hopes, the presidential candidate who said he could feel their pain and who promised to respect and protect their future. Reality bites, indeed.

When asked to assess their own degree of satisfaction with life, teens are no different than adults. About 6 out of 10 say they are very satisfied with life, while the rest are less sanguine about their earthly experiences. What makes this especially intriguing is that, historically, teenagers have been more optimistic and enthusiastic about life than adults. After all, adults are saddled with numerous weighty, long-term realities: mortgages, taxes, child-raising issues, health problems, marriage stress and career challenges. Maybe it's just because I'm an adult now, but it seems only natural that adults would have a less sanguine view of the world. People who hold the responsibility always harbor a deeper level of concern and realism than those who are just along for the ride.

Of course, teenagers face obstructions, too, ranging from dating, sexuality and school to parents and money. But teens have typically emerged as sufficiently energized about their relative lack of heavy responsibilities and the plethora of unique and first-time opportunities that they have seen life as more fulfilling and exciting. But the times are changing.

You cannot conduct serious research among teenagers these days without concluding that, contrary to popular assumptions, there is substance to these young people. They clearly possess a core of insights and a commitment to world impact that often get overlooked by the media. They are more than just a generation of disillusioned whiners (although, superficially, a case can be made for such a characterization). They are more than simply a group of inadequately trained, underskilled, ambivalent worriers (although there is credible research to back this portrayal, too). A more comprehensive profile of these adults in youthful bodies shows that they have an intensity and a perspective about life that can be described by the following six "s" words.

### They Are Serious About Life

Granted, today's teens love humor and reflect a sarcastic wit that betrays their fears, doubts and insecurities about life. But they are also savvy enough to know the score when it comes to the state of the economy, the

environment, politics and government, morality, family, faith, racism and globalism. They are serious because they recognize that frivolity is for those who can afford such a devil-may-care attitude: they cannot. With quality of life issues at stake, they feel the weight of the bad decisions of past generations on their shoulders. Life is truly an unending series of trade-offs and compromises, fights and deals. Earlier than ever before, today's segment of teenagers realizes that their decisions today will shape significant aspects of their life from here on. And although it conflicts with the popular notion of modern teens, our research has discovered that teens believe that you reap what you sow. Consequently, they believe that they alone are responsible for what they ultimately get from life and they must, therefore, strive to make something worthwhile out of life.

### They Are Stressed Out

Many sources of stress and anxiety are present in the typical teenager's life. School is a major stress. Family is another. Peer pressure is often overwhelming. Sexuality is baffling but ever-present. Techno-stress is very real, even to this generation that seems born to become software designers. Financial woes are widespread. The threat of crime is a daily challenge. Even the political correctness mind-set teenagers frequently embrace is a cause of stress. The current crop of teens is not the first to confront stress; it comes with the territory. Psychologists and sociologists, however, seem to concur that today's teens are drowning in a sea of tensions that threaten to paralyze them.

### They Are Self-Reliant

Again, a hallmark of teenagers is their lust for freedom and independence. Teens in the mid-1990s, though, are raising the my-world-my-choice-my-turn style to a new art form. In some instances, this is out of necessity. One study we conducted showed that when it comes to homework and studying for tests—activities that are a central issue for millions of teens—parents fail to make the time, are unable to provide meaningful assistance or just cannot conquer the technology to render appropriate help. In other cases, teens are self-reliant because they believe they alone can make sense out of the issues: faith decisions are a prime example. Some of their self-reliance is a testimony to hormonal turbulence, some of it can be attributed to the predictable rebelliousness and arrogance of the age group. But a reason that is present to a larger degree than has historically been true is related to their understanding of how the world operates and their peculiar role within it.

### They Are Skeptical

Whether this is a perspective mimicked from baby boomers or one learned through experience, most teenagers have little faith in the reliability of people, the assumed motivations behind people's actions, the viability of marketing claims, the ability of institutions to provide meaningful benefits, the existence of moral absolutes, the trustworthiness of journalists and the media, and the capacity of leaders to fulfill their promises. It is not so much that teenagers do not believe that good things can happen or that progress is unlikely; they simply reject prior claims regarding who will champion such gains, how they will be achieved, and what the benefits of alleged advances may be for themselves. Skepticism has become the psychological and emotional security system designed to shield them from disappointment.

### They Are Highly Spiritual

Teenagers are not flocking to Christian churches, but they are intensely interested in spiritual matters. For some, this means following in their parents' footsteps and exploring the same religious route traveled by their parents. For an increasing number, however, their parents neither encourage a spiritual quest nor leave a spiritual legacy to explore. Thanks to ever-expanding access to information about different faith systems and a national obsession with diversity and tolerance, teenagers are investigating many divergent faiths. So far, they are either attaching themselves to an established religious group or following in the footsteps of many boomers by customizing a religious belief system that is personally appealing, if not internally consistent.

Many teenagers believe that a major component of America's illness is that we have lost our sense of the divine and the mystical. Millions of teenagers are seeking to incorporate their spiritual understanding into their daily existence, making faith more than a Sunday experience, but rather a life filter. Make no mistake about it though: "Spiritual" is no longer synonymous with "Christian."

### They Are Survivors

Teenagers have an entirely different set of criteria for success and comparatively less passion for excellence and superiority than was true of boomers (and, to a lesser extent, the preboomer generation). Consequently, they may seem to be confused, complacent, less productive and to wrestle with a general unease about life. Let's realize, however, that these characterizations are coming through the analytical filter of societal leaders and cultural analysts—people whose view of teenagers is affected by standards of suc-

cess and value grounded in the drive for excellence, an obsession with progress and the perception that bigger is better. From that perspective, it is reasonable to question whether or not teenagers will "make it" in life. They do not have the same passion for dominance. They are not as driven by an individualized lust for power, control and attention.

But teenagers will survive. They are not necessarily lethargic or lacking in motivation; it just seems that way to older people who operate on the basis of a different worldview and different personal goals. The truth is that teenagers are realistic, not idealistic. As such, they can handle a difficult circumstance far better than many of their predecessors might have. Those predecessors, however, have little understanding of, or appreciation for, the manner in which teens assess, address and evaluate life situations and their responses to those conditions.

#### Note

1. STD is a commonly used abbreviation for a sexually transmitted disease, such as herpes, gonorrhea or syphilis.

## 2 THE BIG PICTURE: CONCERNS AND CRISES OF YOUTH

As we shall see, many people overstate the anxieties and fears of youth, for various reasons. Yet it would be naive to overlook the concerns they themselves identify. How do they feel about their lives and what do they plan to do with them? What are their goals, the obstacles they suspect might challenge them, their dreams and hopes and fears?

### LIFE-AND-DEATH DECISIONS

Given the lackadaisical attitude many teenagers demonstrate about life and personal development, it may shock you to find out that 7 out of 10 teenagers believe they have identified their purpose in life. Fewer adults claim they have actually identified their purpose or mission in life! But again, the differences are deceptive because they are based on a totally different framework of analysis and behavior.

Contrary to popular notions, few teens see their lives as being directionless or meaningless. It is adults, as outsiders looking in and assessing the perspectives and goals of young adults, who describe teenagers as lacking meaning and substance, based on the criteria for meaning and substance embraced by the adult generations. It seems that adults agonize about the direction of teenagers much more than teens worry about their own destiny.

Suicide may serve as a useful example of the gap in perspectives between the young and the old. Thirty years ago, when society's current leaders were teenagers, it was assumed that everyone wanted to live as

long and as successfully as possible. Suicide was an unacceptable alternative, widely characterized as an escape route for the weak or a charitable solution for the deeply disturbed. Since that time, the suicide rate has climbed significantly.

The suicide rates released by the National Center for Health Statistics are generally provided for people in age groups defined as 5 to 14 and 15 to 24. The suicide rates for those in the 5 to 14 age bracket have more than tripled since 1950, rising from 0.2 per 100,000 population to 0.7. Among the 15- to 24-year-olds, the rate has also increased nearly threefold, jumping from 4.5 to 13.1 per 100,000 population. (See *The Universal Almanac* 1995, edited by John Wright, Andrews and McMeel, Kansas City, Kans., 1994, page 221.) In fact, based on further analysis of the data by others, we know that during the past decade or so the rate has risen considerably among 15- to 19-year-olds: from 8.5 per 100,000 population in 1980 to 11.0 in 1991. (These figures are from the National Center for Health Statistics data reported in the *Statistical Abstract of the United States - 1994*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C., 1994.)

Now, suicide is viewed as just one of the many viable choices available to a healthy, functional young person. Many kids view it not as a sign of weakness, but as a rational choice in which the alternatives are less attractive. Today, the decision to reject suicide is a conscious statement of priorities and values. In essence, this is the first generation of teenagers who are intentionally making a choice between life (a decision that was initially made for them) and death (a decision that they may now control).

The live-or-die decision is not the only clear example of the difference in worldviews and perceived issues that separate teenagers from adults. The entire issue of purpose in life is another example of the age gap, especially between baby boomers (the parents of teenagers) and the teens. Baby boomers live to pursue their dreams, achieved through goal-setting and an aggressive determination to ascend the social, corporate and spiritual ladders by making their dreams become a reality.

Teenagers these days live to survive and see what happens. They would no sooner plan long-term strategies to bring their dreams to fruition than they would opt to outlaw baggy clothing. Baby boomers have been intent upon reshaping the world in their image, and creating an existence that undeniably bears their reflections. Teenagers are more comfortable implementing damage control procedures than they are championing a power-driven, bigger-is-better, unlimited growth future. In the end, boomers live for themselves. Teenagers live for themselves, too, but with a greater degree of sensitivity to the consequences of their choices upon the lives and choices of others.

## THE CRISES OF YOUTH

You can tell a lot about a group by the issues it identifies as the most pressing or those that cause the greatest level of concern. Our research underscores the immediacy of life for teenagers. Their major anxieties and fears revolve around the short-term realities they face. Dreaming about the new millennium, an emerging new world order and other global innovations is foreign to the teen worldview. Their worldview is tangible and pragmatic. Having little stake in the power game of world politics and economics, the long-term positioning and personal power games that occupy the minds of their elders are totally irrelevant to them.

By far the most pressing concern troubling teenagers these days relates to their educational circumstances. This will surprise many people because we're used to reading reports stating that teenagers are primarily concerned about AIDS, the environment, racism, drug use and alcoholism. We know from our studies among teens that this list of concerns is of significance to those who are 13 to 18 years of age; however, we know just as certainly that these are not the worries that fill their daydreams, their nightmares and their philosophical deliberations.

This makes sense, given the practical bent of American teens. AIDS, for instance, is a dreaded disease and one that is a growing threat to young lives. But few teens have ever met anyone who has died from AIDS. It is not sufficiently real to them for it to be a life-changing concern at the moment. In our national survey of teenagers, when asked to list the top two or three most pressing issues they are facing, AIDS was named by only 1 percent of the group! Yet AIDS exists as an ever-present irritant residing in the recesses of their minds, an issue to be acknowledged and recognized, but not necessarily one that drives their moment-to-moment decision making.

Environmental decay is a politically sexy issue that can get teenagers excited. But our research shows that their excitement about environmental protection wanes quickly. The typical baby boomer who gets involved in an environmental cause lasts an average of less than one year in service to the cause; his investment is intense but short lived. More importantly, environmentalism is a trump card they can pull out in debates with the adults whose generation has mismanaged the environment. Sure, they care about creating a sustainable lifestyle and a clean planet, but again, this is not one of the driving forces in their ongoing decision making. In some ways, it is worse: like AIDS, it lurks in their minds as a looming disaster about which they may have no control or contribution.



Drug abuse is a perpetual and hot political topic because it has the ability to fan the flames of emotion and is a politically safe cause to champion: nobody wants to support drug abuse. The government's statistics show, however, that drug abuse affects a very small proportion of people. More importantly, drug abuse has declined precipitously among young people in the past two decades. Most of the kids have either tried drugs or know peers who have. Drugs are a commodity that both fascinates and scares most kids. But relatively few of them, despite their awareness of the devastating effect of drug abuse on the lives of thousands of teens, are either haunted or shaped by the specter of drug abuse. Whether it is because of ego ("It can't hurt me"), ignorance ("We and my friends aren't into that stuff") or overkill ("It's just a big media hype"), drug abuse is not among the gravest personal concerns of teenagers.

The issue that troubles kids the most is their educational performance. School-related woes outnumber any other concern by more than a three to one margin; almost half of all teenagers (45 percent) said at least one of their top-ranked personal concerns was related to education. The primary dilemma related to education is getting the grades they want, getting into the college they desire and being able to complete their homework consistently. Why is schooling such a crisis? Think about their world. Parents show more interest in the school achievement of their kids than in almost any other aspect of teen life, including their character development. People often judge the intelligence and future potential of young people by their classroom record. Even peer relationships are influenced by academic status. A large share of teenagers' waking hours is consumed by educational activities. The kinds of lifestyle issues that do concern them—from sexual involvement and friendships to jobs, finances and physical safety—are all affected by what takes place at school or in relation to their education. They know that the people who get ahead are most frequently those who use education to their advantage.

What else troubles today's teenagers? The next most pressing items are difficulties with personal relationships (mostly in relation to peers, less frequently in relation to parents); handling pressure (primarily peer pressure, pressure to have sex or to take drugs, drinks or cigarettes); the threat of physical danger or crime; and financial needs or challenges.

Notice that the dominant crises are immediate and short term. That's the way teenagers think and live, more than ever before. They are not overly concerned about things that may be significant problems cons from now—such as health and career decisions and opportunities. Also, recognize that teenagers do not tend to think about underlying causes as much as they wish to confront the outgrowths of those causes. For example, morality and

values are a frontline issue for just 1 out of every 20 kids. Faith decisions and choices are of pressing concern to 1 out of every 25 teens.

## TEEN DREAMS

When pressed to think about the future, teenagers reveal that they want much the same thing most Americans desire these days: happiness, inner peace, comfort and so on. In more practical terms, though, that means that

TABLE 2.1

### WHAT ARE THE MAJOR ISSUES CONCERNING TEENAGERS?

Education-related concerns	45%
Relationships	24
Emotional pressure	17
Physical threats, violence	13
Financial difficulties	13
Substance abuse	11
Morality and values	5
Career considerations	5
Health issues	4
Religious issues or decisions	4

teens want good physical health, close personal friends whom they can count on, a comfortable lifestyle and a single marriage partner who will be with them for life. These elements are deemed highly desirable by at least four out of every five teenagers.

Somewhat less significant, but still considered highly desirable by at least 6 out of 10 teenagers, is having a clear purpose in life, having a spouse and children, living with a high degree of integrity and having a high-paying job. Between 50 and 58 percent of the teen population—a slim majority—indicate that they think having a close relationship with God, having a satisfying sex life with a marriage partner, making a difference in the world and influencing other people's lives would be very desirable.

The elements that are least compelling to contemporary teens include living close to family and relatives, owning a large home, being active in a local church and achieving fame or public recognition.

Categorically, our research suggests that teenagers are not nearly as driven as the boomers were to make a difference in the world. Their goals are not nearly as materialistic, nor as power driven. Overall, teens are attracted by

**TABLE 2.2**  
**LIFE CONDITIONS TEENAGERS CONSIDER TO BE VERY DESIRABLE**

Having good physical health . . . . .	90%
Having close personal friendships . . . . .	84
Having a comfortable lifestyle . . . . .	82
Having one marriage partner for life . . . . .	80
Having a clear purpose for living . . . . .	79
Having a spouse and children . . . . .	69
Living with a high degree of integrity . . . . .	61
Having a high-paying job . . . . .	60
Having a close relationship with God . . . . .	58
Having a satisfying sex life with a marriage partner . . . . .	57
Influencing other people's lives . . . . .	53
Making a difference in the world . . . . .	53
Living close to family and relatives . . . . .	44
Owning a large home . . . . .	37
Being personally active in a local church . . . . .	37
Achieving fame or recognition . . . . .	21

the possibility of direction, emotional wholeness and the development of their own families.

Our research suggests that a change in desired life outcomes occurs between the ages of 13 and 14. During that time, which is a major transition point for many kids as they graduate from junior high to senior high, they begin to shed some of their materialistic urges (e.g., high-salaried occupation, large home) and their interest in religious activity (e.g., relationship with God, church involvement). Sexual relationships become a preoccupation around age 15 and 16. Personal integrity is not a strong issue until age 17.

Gender also influences the objectives of young people. Boys are much more interested in having a satisfying sex life and achieving fame. Girls are notably more desirous of having one marriage partner for life, living close to relatives, influencing other people's lives and making a difference in the world. Although it is dangerous to trumpet stereotypes, it appears the

**TABLE 2.3**  
**WHAT TEENAGERS DEEM VERY DESIRABLE, BY AGE AND GENDER**

	Age					Gender	
	13	14	15	16	17	Boys	Girls
Very Desirable Outcome . . . . .	90%	90%	92%	91%	86%	87%	92%
Having good physical health . . . . .	85	79	86	83	88	83	85
Having close personal friendships . . . . .	86	78	85	85	78	83	82
Having a comfortable lifestyle . . . . .	80	80	76	81	84	74	86
Having one marriage partner for life . . . . .	79	69	81	79	81	77	80
Having a clear purpose for living . . . . .	70	67	75	66	69	67	72
Having a spouse and children . . . . .	56	56	59	62	72	62	60
Living with a high degree of integrity . . . . .	68	56	58	59	58	61	59
Having a high-paying job . . . . .	66	59	56	55	52	55	60
Having a close relationship with God . . . . .	47	47	56	66	64	64	50
Having a satisfying sex life with a marriage partner . . . . .	58	47	55	51	55	49	57
Influencing other people's lives . . . . .	52	58	50	51	52	45	59
Making a difference in the world . . . . .	48	41	44	44	42	37	50
Living close to family and relatives . . . . .	44	30	37	40	32	40	35
Owning a large home . . . . .	42	35	35	38	34	35	39
Being personally active in a local church . . . . .	24	18	20	23	18	28	15
Achieving fame or recognition . . . . .							



axiom that girls have more traditional, outer-oriented values while boys are more selfish and base in their desires has some basis in reality.

It is also apparent that the transition from junior high to senior high rad-

TABLE 2.4

### A COMPARISON OF WHAT ADULTS AND TEENAGERS DEEM VERY DESIRABLE

Very Desirable Lifestyle	Teens	Adults
Having good physical health . . . . .	.90%	91%
Having close personal friendships . . . . .	.84	79
Having a comfortable lifestyle . . . . .	.82	72
Having a clear purpose for living . . . . .	.79	80
Having a high-paying job . . . . .	.60	43
Having a close relationship with God . . . . .	.58	74
Influencing other people's lives . . . . .	.53	39
Living close to family and relatives . . . . .	.44	63
Owning a large home . . . . .	.37	30
Being active in a local church . . . . .	.37	49
Achieving fame or recognition . . . . .	.21	10

ically shakes up the values and worldview of the typical youth, but that the pattern of values and interests is restored after a year or so (i.e., by age 15) to levels similar to those of 13-year-olds. This is interesting because it confirms the anecdotal evidence of counselors and psychologists who suggest that if children suffer from severe lack of direction or absence of goals and values by the time they reach their teen years, it is often too late to have any significant influence on their subsequent behavioral patterns. After studying patterns of faith for years, our research leads to a similar prognosis: if children are not reached with the gospel by age 13, the chances of their accepting the gospel after that point are greatly reduced.

## LIKE PARENT, LIKE CHILD

We have also found that a lot of the views embraced by teens are a mirror image of those espoused by their parents. For instance, when it comes to matters of faith, adults are much more interested in having a close relationship with God or being an active participant in a local church. This is par-

ticularly striking because adults are much less likely to desire these characteristics than was true a decade or two in the past. This decline in interest in traditional religious endeavors, however, may have influenced young adults; perceiving the decreasing sense of significance of traditional spirituality, teenagers may be searching for lifestyle components that they see as more relevant and valued.

Teenagers differ from adults in other perspectives, too. They rate much higher on those elements that smack of materialism or affluence. They are more likely to desire a comfortable lifestyle, a high-paying job, owning a large home and achieving fame or public recognition. What makes this especially intriguing is that in conversation young people are frequently critical of the selfishness and acquisition-driven lifestyles of their elders. They express a desire to lead a simpler life and one that is more sympathetic to the environment and the needy. In comparison to older people, though, they emerge as a generation that is less up front about their desire to lead "the good life," but that has a clear zeal for such an existence.

Another distinction worth noting is that youths seem to be more driven to have an influence in the lives of other people. Almost two-thirds of the teenagers we interviewed said having interpersonal influence is very desirable, while less than half of the adults we interviewed concurred. The implications of this difference are interesting. Influence, of course, is the core of leadership, and one of the defining characteristics of the boomer generation is that it has thus far failed to produce strong leaders in the public arena (i.e., politics, education, religion). We could be witnessing the seeds of leadership that need to be nurtured so that this next generation, as it moves into positions of decision making and authority, will have stronger leaders and, thereby, avoid many of the crises and paradoxes that plague the boomer and builder generations today.<sup>1</sup>

## ON ABSOLUTE TRUTH

The desired future just described is a reflection of a new pool of attitudes and views that define the heart of teenagers. In some cases, we find that the perspectives are parallel to those held by adults at-large; in other instances, teenagers are pushing the envelope farther than adults have dared to (so far).

Consider the issue of truth. About three-quarters of all adults reflect the notion that there are absolute moral truths. Most Americans believe that all truth is relative to the situation and the individuals involved. Similarly, at least three-quarters of our teens embrace the same position regarding moral

times necessary—not merely convenient, common, understandable or acceptable, but necessary.

But teens are caught in a paradox. At the same time as three out of four assert that the Bible provides a clear and totally accurate description of moral truth, a large majority of those same individuals argue that there is no such thing as absolute truth. This is clearly a self-contradictory perspective.

Why is there this seemingly glaring and obvious discrepancy? There seem to be four primary explanations. First, many teenagers use the words "moral" and "truth," but really do not know what they mean. There is a vague understanding of truth and morality—"stuff that has to do with right and wrong." Thus, when they talk about "absolute" moral truth, they're not really sure what we're talking about, even when an explanation is provided. This speaks volumes to those of us who have become comfortable with such language that we use it in our teaching and conversation with teens. Unfortunately, teens probably don't have a clue what we're babbling on about!

Second, some teens are willing to state that the Bible contains absolute truth claims, but because they have not and do not read the Bible, those claims may as well not exist. For millions of teens, the issue is not that they are opposed to the Bible, but rather that the contents of the Bible are simply not a part of their experience. As a result, any insights or wisdom it contains are beyond their comprehension or concern.

For millions of others, the Bible is viewed as a decent book for some people, but one that teens perceive to be irrelevant to their own lives because it does not convey useful principles or standards. Because the Bible and most religious activities are foreign to them and seem irrelevant to what "real life" is all about, they perceive two parallel worlds coexisting: the spiritual, impractical world that contains many pure and absolute (and impractical) dictums (such as truth, morality, love, faith), and the real world, the one they inhabit, which deals with the hard stuff of daily living. Truth may be a wonderful concept, but many teens don't have sufficient interest in such an "impractical" or unrealistic concept to explore it further. Millions of those who do have the interest do not have the philosophical, intellectual, and spiritual foundations to take such an exploration to the next level.

Third, many kids seem to distinguish between the concept of truth and the practice of truth. Sure, they'll allow that there may be a definitive body of truth somewhere—perhaps in the Bible, perhaps elsewhere. But in their personal reality, truth is always relative to the individual and to the situation.

In fact, the intellectual and emotional separation many teens make between impersonal absolute truth and personal truth is very crucial to

**TABLE 2.5**  
**TEEN ATTITUDES**

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
<i>Related to truth:</i>			
What is right for one person in a given situation might not be right for another person in a similar situation. ....	91%	8%	1%
When it comes to matters of morals and ethics, truth means different things to different people; no one can be absolutely positive that they know the truth. ....	80	19	1
There is no such thing as "absolute truth"; two people could define "truth" in conflicting ways and both be correct. ....	72	28	•
The Bible provides a clear and totally accurate description of moral truth. ....	72	27	2
Lying is sometimes necessary. ....	57	42	1
<i>Related to faith:</i>			
God established limits for humankind; acting in conflict with His laws has negative consequences. ....	61	35	4
The Bible does not provide practical standards for living in today's world. ....	27	71	3
Anyone who relies upon the Bible or religious faith for moral guidance is foolish. ....	10	90	0
<i>Related to worldview and lifestyle:</i>			
The main purpose of life is enjoyment and personal fulfillment. ....	64	36	•
You know that something is morally or ethically right if it works. ....	42	57	1
One person cannot really make much of a difference in this world. ....	17	83	•

(\* indicates less than one-half of 1 percent gave this response.)

truths. Not only do more than three out of four teenagers say there is no absolute moral truth, four out of five also claim that nobody can know for certain whether or not they actually know what truth is. This may also help to explain why a majority of teenagers (57 percent) say that lying is some-

understanding them. Most teenagers believe that some truth may well be explicated in the Bible. They are perfectly willing to let people who dig for those nuggets of wisdom and insight live according to them. But they are not willing to suggest that the alleged truths in the Bible are the only truths, or the most important truths, or even that they are personally relevant truths. Thus, the truth that may be in the Bible is seen in relativistic terms: if the Bible contains your truth, so be it; allow everyone to find his or her own sources of truth and to deal with those perspectives accordingly.

Fourth, we have found that today's young people, probably more than recent generations of youth, are perfectly capable of living with intellectual contradictions. They are comfortable with the fact that some form of truth exists, but is not influencing their personal thoughts or behavior. Again, theirs is a tangible world; survival is more pertinent and real to them than intellectual consistency or perfect wisdom. If they possess inherently contradictory views, so be it. As long as they can get by from day to day, and have some degree of enjoyment and personal fulfillment, don't rock the boat. After all, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Matters of faith raise some similarly interesting insights. Again, part of the intrigue is recognizing that teenagers hold some views that stand in vivid contrast to their behavior. Their views about Christian faith are relatively on target. Three out of five assert that God has established limits for people, and that ignoring those limitations brings undesirable consequences. Three out of four contend that the Bible contains practical principles for living successfully these days. And only 1 out of every 10 teenagers believes that people who rely upon the Bible or their religious faith for guidance are acting foolishly. And yet, their perspectives and behavior are barely influenced by the Bible, faith or other religious experiences and perspectives.

In the end, teenagers like their parents, possess a rather selfish, tangible, secularized view of life. We are on earth only to wring as much pleasure, fulfillment and joy out of the experience as possible. Much of teens' activity is measured in very momentary and tangible terms: If it works, it's right and good; if it fails, it's inappropriate and wrong. Remember, of course, that right and wrong are conditional. And in the process, if they are able to assist others in viewing the world as they do, they then have an opportunity to make a difference in the world. Teenagers may not be idealistic, but they do believe they can still redeem crucial components of our present-day existence in line with their personal perspectives of right and wrong,

## Note

1. Throughout this book, mention will be made of the nation's four adult generations. Teenagers are part of the baby buster generation, the group born between 1965 and 1983. The baby boomers, the nation's largest generation ever, are those born from 1946 to 1964. The preceding generation are the builders, the small but driven generation who bridged traditional values with a wartime "we can make America a world leader" mentality, they were born from 1926 through 1945. People born prior to 1926 will simply be referred to as seniors in this text. For a more complete description of the definitions and differences among these groups, see George Barna, *Baby Busters: The Dwindling Generation* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1994).

## 3 THE CHARACTER OF OUR TEENS

On a recent trip through Thailand, one of our guides explained to us how elephants are trained. When an elephant is very young, it is tied to an immovable stake, much in the same way as a horse may be tied to a hitching post. Unable to break free from the stake, the young elephant eventually stops trying to escape from the rope and stake that limit its range. The animal's owners then have greater freedom in the selection of supports on which to tie the elephant. Sometimes the owners may use just a small wooden stake that is tenuously implanted in the ground. Trained to believe the stake is not going to give, the elephant does not attempt to break loose.

As the elephant grows bigger and older it gains the strength to easily yank the stake out of the ground and gain access to a wider area. Because the bulky pachyderm was trained right from the start that its access is restricted to the area defined by the length of the rope around its neck, however, it does not try to expand its territorial horizons.

Teenagers might be thought of in a similar way—not the rope around the neck part, which many parents, teachers and youth leaders have considered, but the part about reacting to circumstances and opportunities in response to their conditioning and their resulting self-perceptions. As a generation that is more reflective than the action-oriented boomers who came before them, the perspectives of today's teenagers about their character and abilities are substantially different in comparison to the teenagers of the past several decades.

## A SELF-PORTRAIT

When teenagers describe themselves, the profile that emerges is different from what is expected. Although their generation is, in general, less optimistic and excited about the future than were prior generations of young people, they nevertheless portray themselves in a positive light.

Given a list of adjectives to describe themselves, their choices are startling in comparison to the conventional wisdom about teens. Consider these outcomes drawn from a recent national survey we conducted among a representative sample of teenagers.<sup>1</sup>

- Four out of five describe themselves as "excited about life."
- Three out of four say they are "trusting of other people."
- Three out of four claim to be "optimistic about the future."
- Two out of three see themselves as "a leader."
- Two out of three believe they are "physically attractive."
- Just over half (56 percent) contend that they are "religious."
- Two out of every five admit to being "stressed out."
- Only one out of every eight suggest they are "lonely."
- A mere 12 percent use the term "discouraged" to describe themselves.

Does this sound like a profile of a group of losers and individuals who believe they possess little value, little hope and little joy? Hardly. From where, then, do we get all the media hype about a generation of disillusioned, sullen, hopeless, angry and depressed youth?

Let me suggest a few possibilities. The contrarian view of today's kids does not emanate from any single source. Put the following pieces together, however, and you'll find the puzzle that emerges is of a young adult population that may, in fact, be less mainstream than were past classes of teens.

### Hyping Generation X

Teenagers are part of the baby bust generation, which the media have enjoyed lampooning as the hapless, hopeless "Generation X." To the disadvantage and chagrin of teens, the behavior and views of the entire buster generation, which is now dominated by people who are 19 to 30 years old, are assigned to teens. The truth of the matter is that teenagers are only a small part of that generation and they do not necessarily reflect the same thoughts and behaviors as the older busters—well, not yet anyway.

### Pretransition Period

A transition period seems to take place between the ages of 18 and 25 during which many transformations occur in the worldview, relationships, values, beliefs and lifestyles of young people. During this period, they experience some of the freedoms they have desired for so long, and their idealism and hope fades.

Jobs are less fun and less lucrative than expected. Church attendance becomes a practice of the past, diminishing the significance of religion. Family becomes an emergency support system rather than a daily security blanket. Education becomes serious stuff, rather than merely a precursor to college realities. Sexual relationships become more laden with long-term implications and treacherous emotional minefields. The cost of living changes from a newspaper expression to a personal challenge. As yesterday's teens have shifted into the independent adult role, we have watched their attitudes and lifestyles take a turn to the pessimistic. That demise of hope is often assumed to characterize the views of teenagers as well.

### Futility and Stress

In comparison to past teenage segments, the current group actually is less sanguine about life. We know, for instance, that feeling stressed out about life has increased from 25 percent in 1990 to nearly 40 percent today. Other changes in attitude and demeanor include a heightened sense of the futility of politics; a huge increase in the proportion who live with the fear of being the victim of a physical crime; a rise in the discouraging assumption that they will not be able to afford an education, a house and a comfortable lifestyle; and less belief in the ability of traditional social institutions, such as marriage and religion, to provide order and predictability to life. In fact, we also find that fewer kids now believe they will be able to fulfill their dreams or to achieve the ever-elusive goal of "happiness."<sup>3</sup>

### Outside Interpretations

The behaviors and words of teens are interpreted by adults within the prevailing cultural context. Those interpretations by others, rather than the actual self-views of teens or their true motivations, often serve as the description of the teen population. Twenty years ago, when teenagers used profanity in public it was viewed as an attempt to rebel or to draw attention. Today, it is viewed as a natural part of society's cultural change. Back then, kids who went to the science club or computer lab were deemed eggheads; today, we assume that silicon runs in their veins. When a group of kids got together in the early '70s, we assumed it was either to start a

demonstration against the war or to initiate a sports competition. Today, we immediately worry about street gangs.

Two decades ago, kids went to church because their parents accompanied them. These days, fewer and fewer parents are attending; the kids are seeking spiritual direction through alternative means. Two decades ago, the drugs of choice were marijuana and hashish; now, it's alcohol. It used to be a big deal for teens to sneak into an R-rated movie. Currently, it's hard to find theaters that challenge the age of ticket buyers. Consequently, in this new cultural context, the same behavior carried out today may be interpreted entirely differently from what it was in the past—even though it may be driven by the same motivations as in the past.

### Values in Motion

The values and leisure preferences of teens are changing all the time. This is at least partly attributable to new technologies and to significant changes in family structures and relationships. Yet, many social analysts continue to characterize teens in light of traditional expectations and lifestyles, rather than in the prevailing context. This results in teenagers being cast as valueless, lazy and unsupportive of family. In reality, they are not valueless, because the absence of values is impossible. Instead, teenagers today simply have more fluid, less influential, values. Their values seem unorthodox compared to those of the builder and senior generations, but they are values nevertheless.

Teenagers' apparent apathy may be chalked up to not having the same achievement-based goals as most adults have, and thus they are less motivated to produce. And they are not really unsupportive of family. On the contrary, they are scared of becoming too dependent upon their families because so many families wind up being divided, creating serious emotional damage to those who relied upon the family for stability and connectedness.

### The Self-Perception Gap

Researchers are well aware that a person's self-image may have only a slim relationship to the image of that person held by the world at large. Think about it. How often have you met a person who thinks he or she is a brilliant conversationalist, but your assessment is that the person is a world-class bore? How many people do you know who believe they do wonderful work on the job, but who are merely average producers, at best? Have you ever attended a church where the pastor regularly gives sermons he believes are insightful and witty, but you characterize as part of God's punishment for your sins?

The same principle is at work in the self-perceptions of teenagers. Believe me, two-thirds of them are not leaders, no matter what they think of themselves. When you begin to press them for specifics about their fears, expectations and disappointments, more than one-eighth of them are discouraged about the future. Their trust of people may mean they are willing to listen to what others have to say, but consistently giving others the benefit of the doubt or believing that what they say is true is the exception to the rule. And although this is a relational group of people, millions of them have yet to figure out how to build lasting, substantive relationships with other people. Lonely? They'd hate to admit it because that's tantamount to saying they have failed in their efforts to be popular and connected. For some teens who place a premium upon connectedness, admission of such failure is too much.

But we ought not to castigate teenagers for their erroneous self-perceptions; it's a behavior that was modeled for them by their parents.

The self-portrait teenagers paint is not so much designed to mislead people as to anesthetize themselves to the harsh realities of today's life. Given our earlier discussion that their decisions not to commit suicide is a rational choice and a statement about life, it may be that by having crossed the "live or not to live" threshold they are now confronting some of the consequences of their choices. Having chosen to continue their lives, they must now figure out how to successfully handle the tensions and pressures of a world they do not control and which seems to be constantly flirting with disaster. Their indefensibly positive self-view is simply one way of handling all that the world is throwing their way.

Psychologists tell us happiness is a state of mind rather than a state of being. Teenagers may have unconsciously discovered and embraced this principle. If they believe they can cope, then they can cope. If they believe in themselves, then they have worth. If they contend that they can make the world a better place to live, then they are more likely to create that better place.

## CRACKING UNDER PRESSURE

It is important to recognize the growing crisis of stress that is engulfing teenagers. We are approaching a time when half of all teenagers will suffer from an acute sense of pressure; half of the 17-year-olds in America already claim they are stressed out. The teen years have always been a tense phase of life, but the tension has traditionally come from sources such as surging

hormones, college entrance exams and the growing sense of urgency to flex one's independence.

### Angst Beyond Their Age

The tensions our kids wrestle with these days transcend the usual pressures of maturation. The new parcel of pressures are imposed by a less tolerant adult society upon an increasingly amenable youth population. Responsibilities that used to be reserved for young adults in their post-high school days are now routinely thrust upon the scrawny shoulders of 13- and 14-year-olds. And these pressures are not just intensive, but also extensive: to perform academically, to balance technology and feelings, to enjoy leisure opportunities, to make wise financial decisions, to deal with sexual tensions intelligently, to balance family and personal needs, to be a good citizen in an age of hyperindependence, to remain connected to the group without abandoning individuality, to get involved in causes that count, to find meaning in life and to watch out for one's personal security (e.g., reputation, crime, violence).

As adults, we look at this laundry list of angst-producing responsibilities and shrug our shoulders: This is just part of the daily regimen for us. But the difference is that teenagers are, well, teenagers; they're just kids. They have not had the requisite time to explore the mysteries and snares of the world without external expectations. They have not had the opportunity to plumb the depths of their characters, to figure out who they really are or to learn more about what is really important to them. They have been robbed of the incubation period necessary to allow their minds, bodies and spirits to develop more fully and get in synch before dealing with the enormously complex realities of life in a "civilized" society at the close of the twentieth century.

### High Expectations

Why the rush to turn teenagers into fully (dys)functional adults? One key is to realize that expectations in America have become out of control. People expect outrageous things of us and we, in turn, put pressure on those around us to perform beyond their capabilities. Consider some of the situations in which we place our kids.

*We expect them to develop a viable values system, even though schools are warned to avoid the communication of values; churches have failed to teach a practical and coherent set of values, and parents continue to abdicate the responsibility for passing on a values system to their offspring. No wonder teenagers are baffled about values. Few adults understand the debate, although they intuitively know that values are important!*



*We demand that teenagers play by adult rules and standards, even though the youngsters are not adequately prepared to compete in the adult world. So, for instance, we send competing and conflicting messages about sexuality, then gasp in horror when teens announce their involvement in a pregnancy. We encourage them to grow in their knowledge and appreciation of technology, then rail about how much time they spend with cable TV, videos, Nintendo and America On-Line. We invite them to embrace role models, but shudder when they list Howard Stern, Eddie Vedder, Madonna, Johnny Depp, Courtney Love and Bart Simpson as the people they would most like to emulate.*

*In short, what we have done is to remove the wall of defense between our children and the world of adult responsibilities. Where parents used to guard their kids from being overwhelmed, many no longer protect them.*

TABLE 3.1

'A' Students	Self-Description of Teens	'C' Students
88%	Excited about life	.74%
85	Trusting of people	.77
83	Optimistic about the future	.58
72	A leader	.53
66	Religious	.43
34	Stressed out	.48
9	Lonely	.18
8	Discouraged	.18

And adult tolerance for teen growth has also waned. Adults are used to confining doing our best with producing the best we can, and we now place the same burdens on our kids. In demanding the unachievable of teens, we blur the distinction between excellence and perfection.

Stress will increasingly emerge as a major factor in the lives of our teens. Many of us may not recognize its effects until they are evident in the perspectives and behaviors of these youngsters as young adults in the marketplace. You will probably experience the outgrowth of their sense of stress even now in the lethargic attitude they demonstrate toward taking on new tasks, meeting achievement goals and deadlines, and seeking closure on tasks as diverse as college (the four-year program is unappealing and uncommon these days), completing books they begin reading and thinking through their purpose in life.

### Relief from the Tension

Our research also highlighted the fact that kids who do well in school and those who believe they have identified their purpose in life (for the moment, at least) are more likely than their peers to feel good about themselves and their future. What we don't know is which causes the other: does achievement create a positive view of the future, or does an upbeat and optimistic view of tomorrow lead to better performance?

There is reason to be concerned about students whose academic performance lags behind the pack. Note the differences in Table 3.1.

Clearly, efforts to enable teenagers to excel in their academic work have some effect upon their view of themselves and their future. It may also affect their willingness to have a good relationship with family and peers and to apply themselves more aggressively to personal development.

But even more impressive than the effect of academic performance is the influence of having a sense of purpose and direction in life. Once again, compare the differences in self-description between the kids who have a defined purpose and those who do not.

TABLE 3.2

Self-Description of Teens	Have Purpose	Do Not Have Purpose
Excited about life	.89%	.65%
Trusting of people	.83	.67
Optimistic about the future	.80	.64
A leader	.71	.49
Religious	.61	.47
Stressed out	.33	.50
Lonely	.7	.24
Discouraged	.8	.21

The relationships are very similar—the bottom line being that the more clarity of purpose, the more likely the person is to have self-worth and to be enthusiastic about the future.

Why does it matter? After more than two decades of public opinion and behavioral research, I have learned that *attitudes shape expectations, and expectations influence outcomes*. In other words, what you think is what you get. People who do not expect their marriages to be successful usually wind up getting divorced. People who assume that others will not like them often end up being friendless. People who do not believe in themselves are incapable of facilitating other people's belief in them. And so it will be with our young

people. If young people see themselves as incapable and unlovable, chances are better than not that their lives will be marked by lack of achievement and loneliness. If they believe that the future holds little promise, they are more likely to live in a debilitating world.

Statistically, more than one-quarter of today's teenagers lack a sense of purpose or the academic achievement that marks them as good candidates for a positive future. That translates to more than 5 million kids between 13 and 17 who are already operating at a disadvantage.

### Brain Power

The issue of academic performance raises yet another quandary: the literacy level and analytical ability of teenagers. In the Age of Information, where information breeds power, the capacity to read, write and reason is crucial to getting ahead or achieving personal goals.

Literacy was elevated to the national headlines recently when an extensive government study proclaimed that half of all adults in America are functionally illiterate.<sup>1</sup> If adults are struggling with literacy, and given the national outcry about the declining level of quality in our schools, what's the prognosis for the young regarding literacy?

In short, it's not a pretty picture. Recent studies have shown that American students are losing ground to students from other industrialized nations (most notably Germany, Japan and France). This can be traced to the fact that American high school students spend only three hours of a typical school day in classes teaching core subjects such as English, math, science, history, geography, foreign languages, civics and fine arts. In other words, of all the time a student spends in a classroom, just half of it is devoted to core subjects. One federal study referred to the situation as the "dumbing down" of secondary education. The report went on to explain that the schools are now expected by parents to take responsibility for teaching everything from personal hygiene to responsible consumerism.

A report by The National Assessment for Educational Progress concluded that three-quarters of high school seniors do an hour or less of homework each night, most of them read 10 pages or less in a typical day, and large numbers of students are uncomfortable working with simple mathematical problems. Meanwhile, a Census Bureau report states that 31 percent of youths ages 12 to 14 and 35 percent of kids 15 to 17 are enrolled below their appropriate grade level or prematurely dropped out of school. Funding cutbacks have resulted in larger class sizes, which lead to less personalized attention from teachers. Textbooks have been simplified. The

school year has been shortened and national standards for achievement are being resisted.

The results are predictable. Vocabulary levels of teenagers are plummeting. In a standardized vocabulary test among 18-year-olds who expect to enroll in a college the coming year, students correctly defined the test words only 30 percent of the time. That is roughly equivalent to what they would have scored through random guessing.<sup>2</sup> College entrance exam scores on standardized tests have been slowly declining in both math and language skills for the past three decades. Interviews we have conducted among employers suggest that teenagers represent a poorly skilled labor pool with whom it is difficult to communicate on anything but an elementary level. Students consistently show a declining ability to solve problems, to articulate a well-reasoned argument, to think conceptually and to build lasting relationships.

It has been suggested by some educational researchers, however, that we may be in a transition time in which styles of thinking are changing and the schools have not yet discovered how to capitalize on this new situation. There is evidence that the introduction of computers within the classroom and in homes is having an unintended effect on how kids collect, organize and analyze information. Some have called this a shift from a traditional "linear" style of thinking (moving from point A to point B to point C in succession to reach an organized conclusion) to a more technology-driven "parallel" or "mosaic" mode of thought (moving randomly among a series of points before integrating them into a coherent pattern and drawing a conclusion). This new form of thinking is in line with how computers organize data and how some computer games and software packages lead kids to think.

This new style may be beneficial to the emerging generation. Mosaic learning permits faster processing and a greater absorption of information than does a linear pattern. The analytic process may take longer, but the residue is a heightened possibility of creative solutions to complex problems.

## THE QUESTION OF CHARACTER

All of the attributes we have discussed reflect the inner being of our youth. If they are to master their world, they will do so the same way every other successful generation in every nation has—on the strength of their character. Facts can be researched, techniques can be learned and relationships can be developed. But character is the inner quality that determines the



paths they will pursue and their responses to the choices they face. Character will define teenagers and their legacy.

As we survey the character traits of teenagers, we find them to be the latest iteration in a constantly evolving breed of young people. If the teenagers of old were rather static and predictable, those since the late '80s have been continually breaking new ground. Without becoming immersed in statistics, here is what we have determined about our present crop of teens.

*Teenagers respect integrity in other people, but are not willing to make the sacrifices to develop integrity in their own lives.* Compared to past generations of teens, today's teens are more likely to cheat on exams, lie, loaf on the job, steal from those who have an abundance, exploit the mistakes of others rather than show compassion toward them, and avoid accepting responsibility, unless they can see an advantage to embracing it. In many instances, integrity is taken to mean doing whatever furthers one's personal advantage without being caught. Teens have little sympathy and no respect for those who strive to beat the system and fail. We are not aware of any segment that has so easily embraced such concepts as the "white lie" and stealing with the intent of returning the taken goods (i.e., "permanent borrowing").

*Many teens lack relational skills.* Relationships are more highly esteemed by today's teens than by boomers when they were of the same age. Yet, while many teens desire deeper, lasting relationships, they do not have the communication skills, the commitment to loyalty and forgiveness and the emotional maturity to foster such bonding. One reason group activity—dating, entertainment and sports—is so popular is because it takes the onus off the individual, diverting the attention to a variety of people rather than a single individual or couple.

Teens do appreciate efforts by peers at developing true friendships and, in their own awkward ways, typically seek to maintain existing ties. People are more important than organizations, policies, structures or products to the teen, again, this conflicts with the model shown to them by their parents' generation. The death of family and friends remains one of the most frightening possibilities that lurk in the recesses of their minds.

*Attention spans are shorter for teens.* Channel surfing and radio scanning are common. Reading magazine articles instead of books is in. Movies on video are often interrupted for breaks. Listening to lectures (or sermons) that extend beyond 20 minutes or so is torturous. Attention levels can be improved through interactive processes.

*Compassion runs hot and cold with teens.* They like the concept, but struggle with the application. On the one hand, the majority desire to help the poor and needy; on the other hand, their concern wanes after a short period of

time. They tend to believe that if something bad happens to a person, the person probably had it coming. Americans have historically rooted for the underdog; today's teens have little interest in losers.

*Personal freedom remains a hot issue among teens.* As Juliana Hatfield, the musician, who is one of the leading songwriters of the bustier generation, explains, "I'm totally committed to the cause of individuality. That's the only thing I stand by: independence."<sup>16</sup> Many teenagers echo that sentiment. Programs that require regular attendance, close adherence to restrictive rules or living by hierarchical authority structures are avoided. Teens are not anarchists, but they do appreciate a huge degree of latitude in their lives.

*Persistence is not a trademark of today's teenagers.* They live in a world of opportunities and a world defined by change. They don't hesitate to flit from option to option, sampling the alternatives and savoring the best until a better possibility emerges. (The sole exception would be in friendships; in this arena they fare better at building lasting bridges.) Their patterns of sticking with jobs are horrendous. Their commitment to causes shifts on a 9- to 12-month cycle. TV networks crave teens as an audience (because advertisers target them), but are stupefied by their irregular viewing habits. Homework problems that cannot be solved within a few minutes typically do not get solved. Saving money for the future is not their forte.

*Morality remains something of an enigma to most young people.* They are likely to describe themselves as moral not because of what they do, but because of how they feel. Because they believe they always try to make the right decision in any situation, most deem themselves to be moral individuals. In practice, however, they live in accordance with situational ethics and moral relativism. More than four out of five of them argue that there is not—and cannot be—such a notion as absolute moral truth. They contend that only they can determine what is right or wrong for themselves in any given situation, and that what is right or wrong for themselves may be different from the choices made by others in the same situation.

Lacking absolute standards and moral benchmarks, today's teens are constantly under the stress of having to determine (and defend) their decisions about right and wrong. Because they operate in a values vacuum, they are never comfortable about their moral decisions, but suffer with loads of personal second-guessing. In their defense, though, at least they are struggling with the question. They have been disgusted by what many of them characterize as the overt greed, human manipulation and emotional emptiness of their parents' lives. They want something better, something purer and something deeper. They're still searching.

## KEEP ON BUILDING

Objectively speaking, it must be exceedingly difficult to be a teenager in the late '90s. Teenagers have to convince themselves that there is hope for the future. They are exploring a morally bankrupt culture in search of morals, values, ethics and meaning. They are the most technologically literate group of young people the nation has ever known, but they struggle to communicate what they feel, and they wrestle with decision making. The educational system has let them down, and yet they are the ones who will pay most dearly for that failure. They are worn down by stress, rushed into maturity before their time and operating without viable role models.

You cannot help but have compassion on teenagers. More power to them if they are able to persuade themselves that it is worth sticking around for the future.

### Notes

1. The survey "Teenage Update 1995" was conducted through telephone interviews with 723 young adults between the ages of 13 and 18. The interviews were conducted in December 1994 and January 1995 with a random sample of these teenagers.
2. Corroboration for these views comes from some of the ongoing explorations by Barna Research among teens, studies by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, and tracking studies of teenagers conducted by The George H. Gallup International Institute.
3. "Adult: Literacy in America," National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 1993.
4. "Education: No Time for Learning," *Newsweek*, 16 May 1994, 58.
5. "Talking with Fewer Words," *American Demographics* (April 1995): 13.
6. Jeff Giles, "Sex and the Single Songwriter," *Newsweek*, 6 September 1993, 52.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Ray S. *Ministry on the Fireline*. Pasadena: Fuller Seminary Press, 1998.
- Anderson, Virginia, and Lauren Johnson. *Systems Thinking Basics: From Concepts to Causal Loops*. Waltham, MA: Pegasus Communications, Inc., 1997.
- Armstrong, John H., ed. *The Compromised Church*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998.
- Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975.
- Becvar, Dorothy Stroh and Ralph J. Becvar. *Systems Theory and Family Therapy: A Primer*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999.
- Behe, Michael. *Darwin's Black Box*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.
- Broderick, Carlfred B. *Understanding the Family Process*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1993.
- Cooper, Rodney L. *We Stand Together: Reconciling Men of Different Color*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1995.
- Cosgrove, Charles H. and Dennis D. Hatfield. *Church Conflict: The Hidden Systems Behind the Fights*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.
- Deming, W. Edwards. *The New Economics for Industry, Government, Education*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Out of Crisis*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000.
- Donfried, Karl, and Peter Richardson, eds. *Judaism and Christianity in First Century Rome*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.
- Ellet, William. *The Case Study Handbook: How to Read, Discuss and Write Persuasively About Cases*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2007.
- Finzel, Hans. *Change is Like a Slinky*. Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2004.
- Ford, Leighton. *Transforming Leadership*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991.
- Friedman, Edwin H. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1985.

Gharajedaghi, Jamshid. *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture*. Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2006.

Goldenberg, Irene, and Herbert Goldenberg. *Family Therapy: An Overview*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1991.

Griffin, Em. *Getting Together: A Guide for Good Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 1982:

Johnson, Harold. *Mentoring for Exceptional Performance*. Glendale, CA: Griffin Publishing, 1997.

Merriam, Sharan B. *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998.

Miller, Glenn T. *The Modern Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.

Morris, Margie. *Volunteer Ministries*. Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1994.

Naumes, William and Margaret Naumes. *The Art & Craft of Case Writing*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006

Oakley, Ed. and Doug Krug. *Enlightened Leadership: Getting to the Heart of Change*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.

Pfeiffer, Charles F. *Old Testament History*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1973.

Satir, Virginia. *Peoplemaking*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, 1972.

Scazzero, Peter. *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.

Senge, Peter M. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990.

Schaller, Lyle E. *Choices for Churches*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

Schein, Edgar H. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2004.

Schwartz, Richard C. *Internal Family Systems Therapy*. New York: Guilford Press, 1995.

Scott, J. Julius Jr. *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995.

Senter, Mark III. *Recruiting Volunteers in the Church*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990.

Soldarini, Anthony. *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdmans Co., 2001.

Steinke, Peter L. *Healthy Congregations: a systems approach*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_. *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1993.

Stembrenner, Gunter. *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

Walrath, Douglas. *Making It Work*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994.

Weems, Lovett H. *Church Leadership*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

Wilson, Marlene. *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983.

Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol. 5. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003.

## VITA

Eugenia (Genie) A. Bennett was born in Cambridge, MA on April 20, 1946. She grew up at Park Street Church in Boston under Harold J. Ockenga and graduated from Gordon College in 1967, with a B.A. in Linguistics and Foreign Languages. She earned an MAR from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 1999.

As a young woman, she spent seven years with Pan American World Airways, as a flight attendant and in management, where she learned, for the first time, about an open systems approach to management. Later, as a young mother, she balanced home life with a part time job as a fund-raiser for a non-profit museum. She then spent 20 years in the corporate world in marketing and corporate training. Throughout this entire time, she spent years in lay leadership in various churches, and as a teacher of adults in local churches in Florida, Massachusetts and New Hampshire. As Chairman of the deacons in a fast growing church in New Hampshire, she experienced the tensions between governing boards, problems in trying to meet the needs of new believers, and determining the vision and mission of a church that was changing its culture and its focus.

After graduation from GCTS, she became a consultant working with Christian organizations by helping them identify where they were in their development, helping them recognize problems that were preventing them from reaching their potential, and suggesting solutions that would enable change and growth.

This thesis was written in 2007 and is based on a consulting project that lasted three years, from 2001 – 2004. She will be graduating the D. Min. program in spring 2008.